



**Axel Honneth**

Reconceiving Social Philosophy

Dagmar Wilhelm





Axel Honneth

# Reframing the Boundaries: Thinking the Political

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*Reconceiving Social Philosophy*

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ROWMAN &  
LITTLEFIELD  
INTERNATIONAL  
London • New York

Published by Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.  
6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom  
[www.rowmaninternational.com](http://www.rowmaninternational.com)

Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd., is an affiliate of  
Rowman & Littlefield  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706, USA  
With additional offices in Boulder, New York, Toronto (Canada), and London (UK)  
[www.rowman.com](http://www.rowman.com)

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: HB 978-1-78348-639-7

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Wilhelm, Dagmar, 1975– author.

Title: Axel Honneth : reconceiving social philosophy / Dagmar Wilhelm.

Description: London ; New York : Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, [2018] | Series: Reframing the boundaries: thinking the political | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018034388 (print) | LCCN 2018040056 (ebook) | ISBN 9781783486410 (electronic) | ISBN 9781783486397 | ISBN 9781783486397 (cloth : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Honneth, Axel, 1949– | Social sciences—Philosophy. | Political science—Philosophy.

Classification: LCC B3279.H84574 (ebook) | LCC B3279.H84574 W55 2018 (print) | DDC 301.092—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018034388>

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

# Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	ix
<b>1</b> The Frankfurt School	1
<b>2</b> Honneth on Social Philosophy	27
<b>3</b> Honneth's Recognition Theory	53
<b>4</b> Recognition Theory, Morality and Justice	73
<b>5</b> Recognition and Social Pathologies	103
<b>6</b> Social Freedom and Recognition-Theoretical Socialism	129
<b>7</b> Honneth and Political Philosophy: Democracy and Rawls	171
<b>8</b> Honneth, Postmodernism and the Future of Critical Recognition Theory	193
Bibliography	219
Index	227
About the Author	233



# Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the support of colleagues, friends and family.

Coming to Critical Theory from mainly analytic philosophy, I have benefitted immensely from participating in the Annual Critical Theory Conference in Rome, organized regularly by Stefano Giacchetti. The atmosphere at the conference is productively critical, open and nurturing, and I want to thank Stefano for organizing it, as well as all the participants over the years, from whose feedback and papers I have learned.

Marcos Nobre has taught much about Critical Theory in general and Axel Honneth’s theory in particular, and he has been a great source of insight and support. I also learned a lot from Karin Stoegner and Inara Marin, as well as Ingrid Cyfer and Gordon Finlayson.

Thanks also to the participants of the “Critical Theory and the Concept of Social Pathology” conference, hosted by the Centre for Social and Political Studies in Sussex, and especially to Onni Hirvonen, Arvi Särkelä, Timo Jütten and Fabian Freyenhagen. The Centre remains an important space and resource for Critical Theory in the United Kingdom. Arthur Bueno wrote an insightful piece on social pathology and the discussion with him about our different views influences my ideas—many thanks to him. Several times throughout I received helpful critical feedback from Mariana Teixeira on various ideas, as well as from Federica Gregoratto. I also want to thank Danielle Petherbridge and Estelle Ferrarese. Ina Kerner was very helpful, providing me with material and advice on decolonial theory, for which I am very grateful.

Alison Assiter not only encouraged me to write the book but also read and commented on an earlier version. Her comments were insightful, and her various suggestions and objections were extremely valuable—thank you!

Arto Laitinen reviewed an earlier version and offered extremely valuable and insightful comments for which I am grateful. Thanks also to Evert van der Zweerde for his feedback on the first few chapters. I likewise benefitted from discussion with colleagues at both the University of the West of England, Bristol, and the University of Bristol and want to thank all of them, especially Simon Thompson, Seiriol Morgan, Havi Carel, Anthony Everett, Samir Okasha and Chris Bertram—and also for their friendship and general support. John Horton has been a good friend and a great source of support throughout the years, and I have learned a lot about political philosophy from him—thank you very much.

I am also grateful for audiences at the departments of philosophy at the University of Sussex and the University of Bristol seminar and participants at the continental philosophy workshop at the University of Bristol for feedback on aspects of the book. Over the years I was lucky to have enthusiastic and highly capable students, and I am grateful for inspiring discussions with them.

My friends and family (and Ruby) had to put up with absentmindedness and absences and responded with kind patience and food and plenty of emotional support—thank you very much! The book would not have happened without you or the permanence of your care.

I was introduced to Axel Honneth by the late Dudley Knowles. Dudley was a great source of inspiration and motivation who taught me all I know about Hegel, and I wish to dedicate this book to him.

# Introduction

The motivation for this book is the belief that we need the kind of social philosophy that Axel Honneth and the Frankfurt School are engaged in, both for the sake of social *philosophy* and socially. Honneth's social philosophy commits to and updates a project that was originally formulated by Max Horkheimer in the 1930s. In the face of ongoing and meaningless suffering and a history of enlightened philosophy that has not managed to alleviate this suffering, Horkheimer shares with other left-Hegelians the conviction that social philosophy needs to be radically transformed. Social philosophy shall be concerned with the alleviation of suffering and thus be partisan to human emancipation. In order to be able to do so, it must be firmly anchored in lived social reality. In social reality, it must identify a pre-theoretical emancipatory interest and space for emancipatory transformation. This type of social philosophy is committed to the unity of theory and practice. Further, it must be able to identify, explain and expose mechanisms of domination. To the end of analysis and emancipation, social Critical Theory is conceived of as an interdisciplinary project. Philosophy stands in a dialectical relationship with other core disciplines (for example, political economy, psychology, social sciences and history). Moreover, Critical Theory is a self-reflexive theory that must draw out its own context of theorizing and its own limitation. It is historically sensitive and, in order to be able to capture new mechanisms of oppression and identify novel potentials, it must adapt to its particular historical circumstance. This process might involve the interdisciplinary setup as well.

Its commitment to emancipatory social transformation and its focus on the mechanisms of domination mark Critical Theory as practically relevant. It aims to contribute to our cultural self-understanding and praxis by exposing to us why we engage in “wrong praxis” or why some of the social

practices we participate in are “pathological” and systematically undermine our ability to flourish. As we will see, Honneth can in this way expose mechanisms of various current phenomena (for example, political disenchantment, the success of populism, racism and regressive tendencies in the economic sphere). One of the distinct contributions of Critical Theory, and one urgently needed especially when faced with regressive social tendencies, is that social wrongs are not merely identified; Critical Theorists also offer a backstory, a narrative of why we engage in these wrongs. By doing so, they manage to issue universal normative claims and judgements without having to morally blame individuals (of course, Honneth especially distinguishes between those kinds of wrong that are associated with moral blameworthiness—*injustice*—and those that are not—*social pathologies*). Insofar as Critical Theory can diagnose such ills and plausibly expose them, it might bestir the cognitive transformation that is necessary for emancipatory transformation of the actual material conditions.

Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno see themselves forced to almost completely abandon the emancipatory project in light of the “barbarism” they witness. The project is re-embraced and reconceived by one of Adorno’s students and Horkheimer’s successor at the Frankfurt Institute: Jürgen Habermas. Axel Honneth—Habermas’s successor and in many ways a critical Habermasian—also commits to the core tenets of the original program of the Frankfurt School and adopts various of Habermas’s innovations, but he modifies Critical Theory in important ways and offers his own conception of social philosophy. Honneth discloses the social world in a way that allows an understanding of the mechanisms of oppression and social wrongs and the possibilities of emancipatory intervention. He aims to disclose the world in exactly those terms that resonate with our pre-theoretical understanding in ways his predecessors fail to do.

In short, this book is motivated by the belief that we need to reconceive social philosophy in exactly the way the Frankfurt School conceives it and that Honneth’s particular social philosophy currently represents one of the most promising and powerful reconceptions.

This book will begin with a discussion of the original project as outlined and executed by some of the core members. For reasons of brevity, the chapter is highly selective. It will focus on the idea of a Critical Theory as formulated by Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse and on the critical social analysis provided by Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is one of the targets of Honneth’s critique. This chapter will conclude with a brief introduction of Habermas’s interpretation of the project. In the second chapter, I will outline Honneth’s general approach to social philosophy and trace the early development of his theory in the critique of his predecessors. Here the focus will be on Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas. In this chapter we see the scope of Critical Theory as a theory

equipped to diagnose social pathologies and also as a theory of justice. Honneth also carefully links Critical Theory to social movements. The third chapter will briefly introduce his recognition theory generally, while the fourth and fifth chapters will discuss it as a moral theory and theory of justice (chapter 4) and as a theory that can explicate social pathologies (chapter 5). Honneth's recent works, the ambitious modernization of Georg Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and his theoretical account of socialism will be assessed in chapter 6.

Having reached a substantial understanding of Honneth's approach, chapter 7 will analyse the distinct contribution his recognition framework makes to political philosophy, illustrating the advantages of a critical social philosophy. While all the previous chapters contribute to substantiating the claim that we need this kind of social philosophy, chapter 7 actually presents explicit arguments against rival theories. Finally, chapter 8 critically evaluates Honneth's theory in light of some persistent problems. While the recognition framework remains a promising one, I will suggest it would benefit from some modifications.

This book has greatly benefitted from excellent work done in the field. Jean-Philippe Deranty's insightful and thorough book, which focuses on the early Honneth; Danielle Petherbridge's equally insightful and careful book focusing on Honneth's appropriation of Michel Foucault, Hegel and Habermas; Christopher F. Zurn's comprehensive and sharp recent book on Honneth; and Simon Thompson's excellent and highly perceptive book on recognition theory, covering Honneth, Charles Taylor and Nancy Fraser, have especially been a huge help (and sometimes outright inspiration). Honneth himself is a prolific writer, and I was not able to cover all of his works within this single volume. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I have only been able to engage with a fraction of the Honneth debate and scholarship currently going on.



## *Chapter One*

# The Frankfurt School

“Reconceiving Social Philosophy” refers to the project of Frankfurt School Critical Theory in general and Axel Honneth’s appropriation of the project in particular. Faced with the failure of traditional philosophy, traditional humanities and sciences to significantly alleviate meaningless human suffering, extreme poverty, starvation, war, exploitation and the like, the members of the early Frankfurt School radically change the way we do social philosophy. In this chapter, I will outline and assess the project of the Frankfurt School to engage in a critical social theory that possesses explanatory, normative and practical force. This critical social theory differs from both traditional mainstream social philosophy and sociology. I will begin with an exposition of Max Horkheimer’s re-conceptualisation of social philosophy as critical social theory and trace the realisation of this project in the first- and second-generation Frankfurt School. This will help to better understand the aims and challenges of the project and to locate Honneth in his philosophical-historical contexts. The work of each member of the different generations of the Frankfurt School is manifold, complex and diverse. For reasons of brevity, I will focus on Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse’s outlines of the project, Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s execution of the project in their social analysis and Jürgen Habermas’s appropriation of the original project as outlined, for example, in his inaugural lecture.

### 1.1. HORKHEIMER AND THE PROJECT OF A CRITICAL THEORY

The Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) was formed in 1923. From its inception, the institute was a Marxist centre for social research, associated with the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt. When Max Horkheimer becomes director of the institute, following Carl Grünberg and

Friedrich Pollock, he formulates the programme of a new Critical Social Theory (CT).<sup>1</sup>

The two programmatic texts I will discuss in this section are Horkheimer's 1930 inaugural lecture, "The Current Condition of Social Philosophy and the Task of an Institute for Social Research" ("Die gegenwärtige Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung", published in 1931), and his 1937 article "Traditional and Critical Theory" (TCT).

In his inaugural lecture, Horkheimer outlines the project of the Institute of Social Research under his directorship. He formulates his conception of social philosophy in opposition to the dominant Kantian and Hegelian approaches and proposes an interdisciplinary program. Rather than offering a definition of social philosophy, Horkheimer describes the task of the new discipline as the "philosophical interpretation of the fate of human beings, insofar as they are not just individuals but members of a community".<sup>2</sup> Social philosophy must be concerned with all phenomena of human sociality—for example, state, law, right and economics, as well as culture and art.

Because Horkheimer formulates his view partly with reference to Kant and Hegel, appropriating some and rejecting other aspects of both, it makes sense to outline his project against both and thus to begin with brief remarks about Kantian and Hegelian approaches to social philosophy.

In contrast to Horkheimer's position, which is (also) strongly influenced by Marxism, Kantians interpret the meaning and significance of social phenomena, including social institutions and structures, in terms of the will of autonomous subjects. The abstract autonomous subject is the ground and end of social life and culture.<sup>3</sup> In Hegel, the relationship between the individual and society is turned around. Autonomous agents do not create social structures, institutions and culture (art, religion, etc.); rather, society and history determine and create autonomous subjects.<sup>4</sup> Social phenomena do not receive their meaning from individuals; instead, the life of individuals becomes meaningful and significant only in relation to "the whole" and the role the individual plays in this whole.<sup>5</sup> In his critique, Horkheimer understands the Hegelian "whole" as society, the state, ultimately "world spirit" actualised. World spirit is the end of history and human beings are "sacrificed" for the actualisation of spirit. In the face of human suffering and death throughout history—that is, in face of the "slaughterhouse of history" (Schlachtfeld der Geschichte), necessary for the self-actualisation of world spirit—the task of Hegelian social philosophy is "Verklärung" (transfiguration).<sup>6</sup> Verklärung means that philosophy explains the suffering that might appear unjust and irrational as part of reason and as rational. It proceeds by showing that human suffering leads to the actualisation of spirit, ultimately in form of the state. The state in turn is where citizens can be truly free, and hence the state is rational. Verklärung, as Horkheimer asserts, is more than mere consolation in

the face of suffering; it is reconciliation with suffering and so with the status quo.<sup>7</sup> While the Hegelian metaphysical system has lost credibility, Horkheimer holds that social philosophy is still engaged in the Hegelian project of reconciling humans with ultimately meaningless and arbitrary suffering and death with reference to an “objective spirit”. This objective spirit is conceived of as something superior to human individuals and it is able to provide meaning.<sup>8</sup> Different philosophies, cultures and religions offer different interpretations of objective spirit.<sup>9</sup>

There are two key problems with Hegel for Horkheimer: *Verklärung* and a lack of an objective standard to adjudicate between different conceptions of objective spirit. For one, Horkheimer ultimately rejects *Verklärung* itself, the task of reconciling human beings with meaningless horrors. This rejection forms part of his critical attitude towards idealism in the 1937 essay. The other problem is the inability of social philosophy to formulate a standard by which to evaluate the different notions of objective spirit. Social philosophy is unable to claim that some interpretations are more rational than others, which must thus be rejected.<sup>10</sup> In the remainder of this essay, Horkheimer focuses on this second, intellectual weakness. Social philosophy must not just describe different notions of the whole or objective spirit. In order to maintain intellectual force, social philosophy must be able to come up with objective criteria that prevent a slide into relativism. It must be capable of rejecting reconciliation in terms of a “*Volksgeist*” (a spirit of the people, the fate of a people) as less rational than other explanations.

Horkheimer suggests that in order to properly interpret social phenomena and in order to be able to judge social structures and institutions, social philosophy must be placed into a dialectical relationship with other core sciences, like sociology, psychology, political economy and so on. The relationship between all these sciences must be such that philosophical investigations are informed by empirical data and, equally, the collection of specific data and frameworks of interpretation are informed by philosophical insight.<sup>11</sup> Which disciplines are considered to be core disciplines depends on the social and historical conditions. For example, under conditions of capitalism, economy might be a core subject for analysis of society.<sup>12</sup> This interdisciplinary commitment, the dialogical relationship between different core subjects, remains a feature of the project today, maintained by most contemporary Critical Theorists, including Habermas and Honneth, though the late Horkheimer and Adorno will abandon it.

Horkheimer clarifies his project further in the seminal 1937 essay “Traditional and Critical Theory”. Here he argues that a contemporary social theory must be a Critical Theory. He explains what a Critical Theory of society is by contrasting it with traditional theory along five main dimensions: the question of the aim of a theory,<sup>13</sup> the nature of the relationship between theory and object, the relation between theory and desires or interests and—similar-

ly and importantly—the relation between theory and praxis and the role of history.

### 1.1.1. The Aim of Traditional Theory

Horkheimer traces his account of traditional theory back to René Descartes and Cartesian foundationalism, according to which knowledge can be derived from a few fundamental principles. These foundational principles are themselves either self-evident or based on induction from basic observations or they are stipulations.<sup>14</sup> The aim of traditional theory is to formulate a system of propositions which offers an internally coherent picture of reality.<sup>15</sup> These theories should not contain any irrelevant propositions—that is, propositions about matters that do not in some way influence the subject matter of the theory.<sup>16</sup> The ultimate goal is to formulate a “universal system of sciences”,<sup>17</sup> in which all the sciences would be based on the same premises with mathematics as the universal language of the sciences.<sup>18</sup> Horkheimer claims that this conception of theory underlies natural sciences as well as human and social sciences. Disputes between different sciences, disciplines or schools are disputes about the respective role of theoretical work versus observation and induction. Such methodological disagreements are not disagreements about the nature of theory as such.<sup>19</sup>

The task of traditional theory is not limited to an increase of knowledge; rather, the task is ultimately to enable control over the subject matter, be it the physical world, the human body, economics or society.<sup>20</sup> Traditional theories are tested with reference to their ability to predict processes or events in their fields. They should inform, and hence support, technological developments and ultimately contribute to the control over nature. In this sense, they are also considered socially useful. While scientific theories are linked to technological progress, the sciences understand themselves as engaged in a “value neutral” activity—that is, an activity which is not determined by political, social, moral or economic interests. Vis-à-vis their social and political context, traditional scientists take themselves to be involved in an independent, self-sufficient type of work. The knowledge they increase is objective knowledge. In fact, Horkheimer speaks of a divided self where individuals think of themselves either as disinterested researchers or as citizens with interests, but never as both simultaneously. This division is a mark of an irrational structure of society and part of the aim of Critical Theory will be to overcome such internal divisions of the self which reflect tensions between work relations and individual spontaneity and goals.<sup>21</sup>

In line with their self-understanding as disinterested researchers, scientist in the traditional theory paradigm also think of the objects of their theory as unaffected by theory. The independence of the object from theory is one of the key tenets of traditional theory. This presumed independence allows

theory to be objective. It allows the discovery of natural laws that exist beyond the influence of human beings. For Horkheimer, as we will see below, the independence of object assumption is problematic for epistemological and social reasons. Epistemologically, Horkheimer argues, it is simply a mistaken view of the nature of perception and knowledge formation. Socially it is problematic because it can lead to fatalism or conformism—that is, it invites a view of the world as inevitably the way it is. Traditional theory relies on and reaffirms a distinction between thinking and theoretical activity and action in the world.<sup>22</sup> The independence-of-the-object assumption is thus related to two further presuppositions: assumptions about the relation between theory and praxis and attitudes towards the role of history for theory. In terms of the relation between theory and praxis, the role of theory is reduced to the contribution that theory makes to the development of technology. The role of history for theory is similarly reduced to technological progress, especially in terms of instruments that aid data collection.

### **1.1.2. Critical Theory**

The object of Critical Theory is “the specific individual in his real relation with other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a specific class and in his thus mediated entanglement with the social whole and nature”.<sup>23</sup> The “individual in his real relation” is seen here in opposition to the bourgeois ideal of the independent, autonomous and abstract ego as well as in opposition to collectivist views which conceive of the individual as a mere part of an organism.<sup>24</sup> These collectivist conceptions underlie fascist movements as well as Nazism and Stalinism. The aim of Critical Theory and critical activity is human emancipation. Critical Theory thus reverses the relation between theory and praxis. This goes hand in hand with an epistemologically and emancipatory motivated rejection of “disinterested” theory. Horkheimer argues that the relationship between object and theory is always interdependent and co-constitutive, and both objects and theory are subject to historical changes. Historical self-reflection is thus important for an adequate social philosophy—that is, Critical Theory. Because, as Horkheimer shows, all theory is always formulated from a standpoint and for a purpose—and this purpose determines aspects of the structure of the theory. Horkheimer claims that the open partisanship and explicit commitment to human emancipation is at the root of all structural differences between traditional and Critical Theory—for example, the differences mentioned above but also differences referring to a normative dimension that serves as a critical standpoint, the notion and critique of ideology and regression as mechanisms that prevent emancipation. For Critical Theory, reality is the product of social praxis, it is created by society and can thus be changed through human activity, even if any

particular individual meets reality as externally given and is—on their own—impotent in the face of it.

However, while the structural differences can be explained in terms of the different aims of traditional and Critical Theory, Horkheimer's critique of and reaction to traditional theory is based primarily on epistemological positions which have normative implications.

### 1.1.3. Neutrality

Horkheimer takes issue with the idea of a disinterested researcher or interest-independent, objective knowledge. All knowledge and all theoretical activity are determined by interest. While Critical Theory explicitly commits to the interest in human emancipation, the interests driving the traditional sciences and traditional theory might be far less explicit. There are several interests at play. For one, traditional theory is grounded in an interest in human survival. Human survival involves survival in at times adverse and dangerous nature. Hence, traditional theory is tasked with enabling the domination of nature through discovery of regularity and formulation of natural laws which allow prediction and—eventually—manipulation (through technology). Science and technology are thus rooted in the need for preservation and are also inextricably linked to domination of nature. Eventually, survival in nature through control and domination necessitates the development of human civilizations. Science and technology are now also involved in the ordering of societies, which involves social control and domination.<sup>25</sup> The traditional sciences are interested specifically in the maintenance of a status quo of the bourgeois order from which they originate. They support the status quo by reproducing and hence affirming—under the guise of objectivity—notions of inevitability, of givenness of physical and social nature as well as by maintaining social institutions which are linked to the particular way in which science is done, especially the economic sphere and the structure of the universities under bourgeois capitalism.<sup>26</sup> Critical Theory, in contrast, opposes the partisanship with the powers that be and the lack of self-reflection and self-awareness about its own complicity in political domination.

### 1.1.4. Independence of Object

Traditional theory understands its object as given, independent of theory and also not changeable through theory.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the human individual experiences herself as passive even though she is active.<sup>28</sup> This view of the object as theory-independent, externally given, is mistaken in Horkheimer's eyes. Rather, there is a relation of mutual dependence and co-creation. Our perception of the objects of theory and hence our formulation of and focus on these objects is determined by theory. This stance in the philosophy and

psychology of perception has a long history, and Horkheimer traces his position back to Immanuel Kant, where “the individual . . . receives sensible reality, as a simple sequence of facts, into his world of ordered concepts. The latter too . . . have developed along with the life process of society”.<sup>29</sup>

Horkheimer also points out that the conceptual framework is socially co-determined.<sup>30</sup> This explains a “perceptual harmony” in social groups with similar conceptual frameworks. These conceptual frameworks are subject to historical change, as shown below and determined by changing social needs and interests. Equally, the objects we perceive influence our theories.<sup>31</sup> Apart from being erroneous, the independence-of-objects-view has consequences for our attitudes towards the world. Inasmuch as objects are perceived as independent, given and external, we are inclined to view the world as independent, given and external as well. This view pushes humans towards either conformism or fatalism, as mentioned above. In other words, the view of objects as independent is linked to our view of the world as necessarily the way it is and an attitude towards human action as fundamentally impotent, despite the fact that the objective world around us is shaped by human activity. Humans build houses, cities and nations, and humans determine social structures and institutions and thus social needs and interests.<sup>32</sup>

### **1.1.5. Theory and Praxis**

Horkheimer conceives of proper social philosophy as “a praxis” directed at change.<sup>33</sup> The task of critical social theory involves an analysis of contemporary society with the view to enabling emancipatory action and hence social change. Rather than statistical descriptions, critical social theory focuses on mechanisms of domination, particularly “ideology” and “regression”. One way in which theory is itself a form of praxis is by exposing mechanisms of oppression publicly. Here it is important to note the difference between purely descriptive ideology critique and critical social theory. Purely descriptive ideology critique is a form of traditional theory in the sense that it conceives of itself as merely observing objective facts—that is, the use and pervasiveness of ideology.<sup>34</sup> Critical Theory exposes ideology as normatively flawed and in such a way that the exposure brings about change. Critical Theory is conceived of as a form of therapy. Unlike psychoanalysis, Critical Theory aims to cure not the individual but society.<sup>35</sup> What Horkheimer could have in mind here is the idea of critical social theory as “world-disclosing critique”, as a critique that exposes ideology in such a way that the exposure prevents its effectiveness. It is important to remember what ideology means in this context: it presents features of the world as being necessarily and inevitably the way they are, even though actually human activity could change those features. Horkheimer is suspicious of the very notion of “necessity” at work here.<sup>36</sup> Especially in terms of society and social structures, what is the case

“necessarily” is not the case in terms of metaphysical, physical or logical necessity, but rather it is the case because of a (temporary) impotence of human beings to rationally organise their communal life. This impotence is what Critical Theory aims to overcome (for example, by showing that the human world is human-made).<sup>37</sup> This relates closely to the idea of freedom operative in critical social theory. Human freedom is understood in terms of rational activity, which is a coinciding of theory and action. Horkheimer contrasts this with the idealist conception of freedom, which conceives of freedom as a property of the realm of ideas and rationality, distinct from the realm of experience and action. Horkheimer traces this dualism back to Descartes and Kant and argues that it ultimately leads to an experience and appearance of impotence in the face of social reality.

Critical Theory is related to praxis in other ways too. Horkheimer talks about the “dynamic relationship” the critic is to have with the oppressed class. The critic and the oppressed class must form a “dynamic unity” such that the exposure of social contradictions stimulates activity that leads to social change.<sup>38</sup> The contradictions include contradictions between social wealth and poverty. This dynamic unity is a conflictual unity, in which the critic sometimes must stand against even the most advanced of the oppressed class.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, the task of Critical Theory is also the formulation of the image of an emancipated future society, a society free from oppression or injustice. This society is a rational society (*Vernünftig*), since any other form of society, is—as mentioned above—internally contradictory, given current technological potential to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression and the ongoing suffering, poverty and oppression in society. Horkheimer emphasises that Critical Theory is theory in the service of the future.<sup>40</sup> The vision of an emancipated future involves imagination, but the imagination is guided by actual technological possibilities. It is the image of a future society as a community of free individuals insofar as technology allows that freedom.<sup>41</sup>

### 1.1.6. History and Self-Reflexivity

History plays an important role in Critical Theory in various ways. While historical developments do not affect the task of emancipation, they affect the nature of society, of the relations individuals have with each other and of social needs and interests. Further, they might also affect the types of mechanisms used to perpetuate oppression. In response to historical changes, critical social theory might have to modify its approach. Two historical developments that Horkheimer is particularly concerned with are the change from bourgeois capitalism to post-liberal capitalism and the change of the nature and role of culture from a potentially emancipatory sphere to a sphere that is increasingly involved in social domination.<sup>42</sup> The demise of bourgeois capi-

talism also leads to the loss of the strong bourgeois ego, or so-called loss of personality, which I will discuss in detail in section 1.3. Briefly, the “loss of personality”—the loss of a strong moral orientation due to the loss of a father figure—is instrumental for the rise of totalitarianism.<sup>43</sup> In the context of the loss of personality, culture can now be used to form subjects in accordance with political or economic imperatives.<sup>44</sup> While such changes do not reduce the need for emancipation, they lead to modifications of the meaning of concepts (e.g. culture) and might also affect the nature of the interdisciplinary project (e.g. they might affect which disciplines are regarded as core disciplines). This also means that Critical Theory has to work without general, abstract criteria like “utility” or “better than”. In fact, it is suspicious of such criteria, since their meaning is historically and socially determined and might be aligned with the interests of those in power.<sup>45</sup>

So Critical Theory has to be historically self-reflective to be able to adapt to social changes. Generally, self-reflexivity is a mark of Critical Theory. The idea of critique that Horkheimer draws on is the Kantian idea of reason setting its own limits. A Critical Theory must be aware of its limitations and biases, which are partly given by its social and historical context. It aims at a rational organisation of society. While Horkheimer rejects those aspects of traditional theory discussed above, he does not dismiss the knowledge and technological developments that accompany traditional theories. Critical Theorists must work with this knowledge, since the rational use of technology is part of the emancipated future society.

### **1.1.7. Materialism and Idealism**

Horkheimer does not just distinguish Critical Theory from traditional theory in the above ways; he also contrasts it to a particular kind of materialism and relates it critically to idealism. Critical Theory is not a form of reductive materialism—that is, a materialism that reduces everything to physical events, which in turn necessarily follow laws of nature. Much of his critique of positivism is in line with a rejection of this form of materialism. Rather, Critical Theory is a form of critical materialism. It is materialist in a Marxian sense, concerned with the material conditions of human life. As a critical materialist, Horkheimer rejects aspects of idealism. As mentioned above, for one, he opposes the kind of idealist dualism that identifies the individual with an abstract, independent ego and locates freedom in the realm of thought. It is a kind of idealism that engages in *Verklärung*—that is, it attempts to reconcile humans with the un-reconcilable, the occurrence of meaningless suffering and death. Transfiguration is an aspect of idealism that helps maintain the status quo. Transfiguration turns suffering and death into ultimately meaningful necessities either because they are a necessary part of the actualisation of spirit or because they will be redeemed in a different world. As

such, transfiguration hides the urgency of changing the material conditions in this world.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Horkheimer rejects “irrationalism”, the romanticism of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, which he associates with forms of totalitarianism. Rather, Critical Theory appropriates aspects of “rationalist” idealism to avoid reductive materialism and irrationalism and open the possibility of emancipatory action and a rational future.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.1.8. Rational Society of the Future

The view of reason at work in Horkheimer is reminiscent of Hegel and the notion of the “rational universal”. In Horkheimer, what is rational is a particular structure of society, one in which members deliberate and agree on ways in which to coordinate their behaviour.<sup>48</sup> Rationality (Vernunft) in the 1937 essay is understood as social structure or form, in which individuals are emancipated by realising that society is the product of social action and by deciding and planning the right kinds of social action (non-oppressive) and hence the right kind of social order. Domination of nature still plays a role, as does technology. While Horkheimer says less about technology than, for example, Marcuse, it is clear that technology is involved in the manipulation of nature (physical, human, social)—and has at the very least a dual character of being dominating and potentially emancipating. Technology is used for the domination of nature—which is and will remain necessary for human survival. However, technology could be used to liberate human beings from all sorts of material and social suffering and constraints (food production, clean water, medication).

While Horkheimer’s idea of rationality and rational society seems to come close to the idea of communicative rationality and the lifeworld we later find in Habermas, Horkheimer does not expand on this notion. His ideas allow for a communicative interpretation in which people reach a consensus about the ends and structure of their society. However, he himself does not provide such an account. As we shall see below, a decade after the essay on traditional and Critical Theory, the possibility of a rational and emancipated society seems beyond the reach even of imagination. Whatever traces of a communicative rationality and communicative action can be found in the 1937 essay, by the time of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer rejects both the notion of a truly emancipatory (and effective) form of rationality and the possibility of emancipatory action.

To sum up: Horkheimer reconceives social philosophy as an interdisciplinary project aimed at human emancipation. In order to facilitate emancipation it has to expose mechanisms of oppression and social contradictions in such a way as to motivate emancipatory action or otherwise stimulate change. This critical social theory is thus descriptive as well as practical with a normative core.

## 1.2. MARCUSE AND CRITICAL THEORY

In this section I will briefly outline a slightly different account of “correct theory”, which focuses more on the economy and tackles the dangers of relativism more directly, proposed by another key member of the institute. Herbert Marcuse joins the institute in 1933, having been influenced by Marxist as well as existentialist thought. Marcuse explicitly commits to aspects of Marxian analysis, especially the pivotal role economic conditions play in determining the social life and social world of individuals. Moreover, Marcuse confronts the challenge of relativism and tries to formulate a normative standard for critique in an attempt to defend Critical Theory against charges of relativism. These charges of relativism are a recurrent problem for Critical Theory, and the questions of a normative foundation of Critical Theory is one of the key themes for several Critical Theorists, including Honneth. Despite the differences between Horkheimer’s approach and Marcuse’s, both agree on some very fundamental assumptions—for example, the relation between theory and interest, as well as the critique of traditional theory as complicit in maintaining the status quo.<sup>49</sup> Marcuse also thinks Critical Theory must focus on specific individuals in concrete relation with other individuals and groups and rejects the idealist conception of the individual as abstract, isolated subject.<sup>50</sup> Marcuse also commits to the view that mechanisms of oppression and possibilities for emancipation as well as the specific needs of individuals are historically determined. For Marcuse, the fact that Critical Theory is a theory for the future and—in many ways—formulated from the perspective of a future emancipated society has important methodological implications. The aim of Critical Theory in Marcuse is the creation of a future society in which individuals rationally plan their social order and cooperation so as to allow each individual to realise their concrete desires and needs. Implicit is the view of the emancipated society as rational and rationality as manifested in free social planning and deliberation processes.<sup>51</sup>

For the purpose of this section I will draw mainly on Marcuse’s essays “Philosophy and Critical Theory” (PCT) and “The Concept of Essence” (CE). Like Horkheimer, Marcuse understands Critical Theory as a non-redundant, roughly Marxian, materialist theory, which aims at human emancipation.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, human emancipation is understood in terms of the actual conditions under which individuals live. Marcuse also emphasises the link between emancipated and rational society, where a rational society is “a social organization in which individuals can collectively regulate their lives in accordance with their needs”.<sup>53</sup> In CE, this is expressed in terms of the integration of particular interest in the universal, without, however, reducing particularity to abstract universality.<sup>54</sup> Emancipated society is constituted of different, unique individuals. Marcuse moves between liberalism and collectivism. Against liberalism and its commitment to the bourgeois ideal of the

independent, self-sufficient autonomous individual, Marcuse emphasises that these individuals genuinely relate to each other in a human community, and their relationships, involving relations of mutual dependence, go far deeper than most liberal views would allow. Against collectivism, which operates in the rising fascism of his time, Marcuse holds that individuals do not constitute a homogeneous people in which any difference indicates non-membership. Emancipated human life, which Marcuse sometimes also equates with happiness,<sup>55</sup> is possible but involves actual social change and struggle.<sup>56</sup>

Critical Theory involves a critique of current social conditions with a view to their suitability for the “ultimate goal”—that is, the achievement of a future emancipated society. From this standpoint, mechanisms that hinder emancipation should be identified and criticised. For Marcuse, the focal point is the economic sphere, since it is the economic structure which determines social life.<sup>57</sup> The totality of social processes is determined by the economic structures, which are thus at the root of much suffering. In Marcuse’s later appropriation of Freudian thought, economic aims have entered deep into our psyche.<sup>58</sup> Although the way we organise the economic sphere is a key factor that prevents human emancipation, Critical Theory goes beyond mere economic theory and includes psychological analysis of mechanisms of oppression. Like Habermas later, and unlike Karl Marx and other socialist thinkers, Marcuse hopes that eventually economy will be “subordinated to the individual’s needs”,<sup>59</sup> that the economy would be controlled by a political sphere and that “political relations would then become . . . general human relations: the organization of the administration of social wealth in the interest of liberated mankind”.<sup>60</sup>

### 1.2.1. Critical Theory, Critical Standpoint and Phantasy

Reference to the standpoint of future emancipated society is essential in Marcuse. This standpoint prevents Marcuse’s Critical Theory from sliding into relativism. It is at the same time a strength vis-à-vis Horkheimer (and Adorno) as well as a source of weakness. The standpoint of the future society seems to render Marcuse’s theory speculative or even naïve. However, a closer look at the construction of this standpoint might strengthen Marcuse’s position here.

In PCT, Marcuse states that the concepts employed by Critical Theory to refer to the future society are necessarily abstract. They are abstract because “concrete reality” does not contain enough elements of an emancipated society to derive concrete facts/conceptions from.<sup>61</sup> This has important implications for the “scientific status” of Critical Theory. While traditional scientific theories help to formulate hypotheses that can be tested in reality (Horkheimer) or use facts as part of their construction (Marcuse), Critical Theory does not have that option. We cannot simply derive (mathematically or quasi-

logically) the future from the present in any case, but especially a future of *liberated* humanity must be created by *free* human beings (of the future). What Critical Theory has to rely on in order to gain concreteness and hence more critical force is “phantasy”.<sup>62</sup> Phantasy, or the imagination, can construct something new out of the old, but phantasy in Critical Theory is not limitless. Phantasy responds to human potentialities; it traces human essence.

### 1.2.2. Essence

In “The Concept of Essence” Marcuse introduces his materialist conception of essence on the back of a historical analysis concept of essence starting with Platonic and Aristotelian views, through Cartesian and idealist views to phenomenological and eventually materialist notions. This historical analysis not only serves to explicate Marcuse’s conception but also illustrates a point about the relation between theory and social conditions, which are historically determined. Each conception of essence mirrors and affirms specific social conditions.<sup>63</sup> Insofar as those conceptions mirror important features of the social order of their time, they contain some truth.<sup>64</sup> The fact that the conception of essence changes with changing “historical interests” shows that interests drive theory<sup>65</sup> and suggests that the appropriate conception of essence is historically determined and changeable.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the essence of a thing includes the un-actualised real potentials of that thing, where real potentials, again, are historically determined. Marcuse appropriates the Hegelian notion of “real possibility” but interprets it in Marxist terms. Real possibilities are not “existing manifolds of circumstances” relating to a thing; rather, they refer to the structure of a thing. The structure can be analysed into form and content.<sup>67</sup> Regarding human essence, Marcuse holds that this is determined by the structure of society. The content of this organisation “is the maintenance and reproduction of society as a whole”,<sup>68</sup> the form it currently takes is the capitalist organisation of labour for “the realization of capital”.<sup>69</sup> However, the content could be realised in a different form, and insofar as different forms, in this case different organisation of productive relations, are possible, we are dealing with content that has “real possibilities”.<sup>70</sup> The alternative ways of organising labour processes or of structuring our society rationally are partly determined by technological development. Even in an emancipated society human needs must be fulfilled. This still involves control over nature through technology and the expedience of energy, but technology can aid us to improve need satisfaction, minimise oppression and repression and “conduct [the struggle for need satisfaction] in a manner worthy of man and without historically obsolete forms of social conflict”.<sup>71</sup> Possibility is also determined by knowledge: knowledge of the fact that the current actualisation is “bad actualisation” and of the fact that the current organisation of society is only one possibility among many. Alternative ways of organising

social life can be achieved through human action. Critical Theory has an important task here: it must describe social reality in such a way as to provide knowledge of both impediments and possibilities.

In order to accurately and convincingly describe “bad actuality”, Critical Theory must operate on two levels of description; it must pick out the “immediate appearance” as well as the “real content” of the social structure.<sup>72</sup> Marcuse goes on to explain that “immediate appearance” is described in non-antagonistic terms such as “wage”, “entrepreneur”, “employer” and “employee”, whereas “real content” is described in terms that pick out the underlying class conflict and power structures of the capitalist order.<sup>73</sup> “Immediate appearance” thus often occludes real content. Moreover, because immediate appearance is the basis of the actions of individuals, it is one essential mechanism in the reproduction of society in its current form.<sup>74</sup>

Crucially, Critical Theory cannot stop at the description of the above mechanisms of oppression; it must also be able to outline alternatives. It must detect those “forces” or “tendencies” within lived experience that aim at realising emancipatory interests and potentials. These tendencies and forces might involve reactions to bad actualisation. Together with the aid of phantasy, such tendencies and forces form the basis of a utopian image of an emancipated future. Marcuse here differs strongly from Horkheimer and Adorno, who are suspicious of utopian thought. It is important to point out that Marcuse’s utopia is in many ways still a “negative” utopia, an image of the future where current sources of human suffering are removed or diminished.

### 1.2.3. Critical Theory and Philosophy

The relationship between Critical Theory and philosophy is complex. On the one hand, Marcuse, like Horkheimer, is deeply critical of various aspects of philosophy, especially the “bad” materialism described above, as well as aspects of German Idealism. The complaints against idealism range from the complacency of philosophy in the face of actual suffering and oppression to the (related) abstractness of philosophical concepts which lead to skewed conceptions of freedom. Marcuse links the notion of freedom and autonomy as extreme independence, and hence the “exclusion of the other”, to these traditions and abstract concepts of autonomy and agency.<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, the very abstractness of philosophical concepts, the emphasis on the individual’s rights versus others enables philosophical thought to resist the “new threat”—fascism or authoritarianism—insofar as this “traditional” philosophical thought, in its very nature, is a site of resistance and refusal.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, “great philosophy” focuses not on the crippled actual capacities of human beings but on human potential, while at the same time this philosophy has constructed human potential in such an ab-

stract manner as to be able to claim that human beings can fulfil their potential in whatever social circumstance.<sup>77</sup>

The relationship between philosophy and Critical Theory that Marcuse describes is exemplary of the relation of Critical Theory to history as such and it is mirrored in aspects of, for example, Adorno's aesthetic theory: Like art, Critical Theory involves a form of determinate negation which does not try to eradicate the old and start from a clean slate, but to remould the same material, using insights and avoiding old errors. The complexity of this relationship to the past distinguishes Critical Theory from much more radical Neo-Marxist positions.

### 1.3. DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Following the above outline of the project of a critical social philosophy, to which I take Honneth to commit, I now want to turn to the problematic execution of the project we find in the social analysis proposed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The problems of this analysis—that is, of the particular realisation of the project—form the basis of later developments in Critical Theory.

Just a decade after Horkheimer proposes the project of an interdisciplinary critical social theory with emancipatory aims and a practical dimension, Horkheimer and Adorno publish a critique of society that seems to foreclose any possibility of emancipatory action and is suspicious of the sciences to a degree that renders an interdisciplinary project almost impossible. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (DE) is seen as one of the key works of the first generation Frankfurt School and it is one of the main texts Honneth focuses on in his in-depth critical engagement with Adorno. Methodologically the text is problematic. Its claims are neither based on nor supported by empirical evidence or philosophical argument. The text is filled with overgeneralisations and exaggerations. As Honneth suggests, it is probably best read as a “world disclosing critique”, which does not intend to raise truth claims but rather to shock readers into a perceptual shift that makes their everyday world appear in new constellations.<sup>78</sup> It is moreover a work which clearly marks the change from the early program to a much more pessimistic social analysis and prognosis.

The *Dialectic* is a collection of essays and fragments, dedicated to Friedrich Pollock, first published in 1947, with a second edition published in 1969 without noteworthy modifications. In fact, what is noteworthy is that Horkheimer and Adorno insist that their 1947 analysis is still, generally, timely in 1969. In many ways, the *Dialectic* seals the fate of emancipation in Adorno and Horkheimer, as it describes the “totally administered society”. It is impossible to do justice to the DE here. In this section I will outline some

of the key themes and sketch the idea of total domination—that is, domination that has seeped into every area of life without any chance of escape. Honneth’s critique of the DE and his interpretation of its methodology are discussed in the next chapter because these criticisms inform Honneth’s own approach.

DE consists of five main essays and a collection of shorter notes at the end. It can be read as history of reason or of civilization which culminates in “a new kind of barbarism”.<sup>79</sup> Tasked with understanding how the rise of fascism and totalitarianism was possible, the DE begins with an outline of the nature and aim of enlightenment, which—throughout the text—is conceived to be broader than the enlightenment period associated with Kant. The aim of enlightenment is human liberation, which means liberating human beings from myth, to make humans masters of the world. However, enlightenment itself is also myth.<sup>80</sup> Reason is the tool of enlightenment. Myth presents the world as inevitable and ultimately beyond human control. While humans can make sacrifices to the gods to appease them, control over nature and humans rests with the gods. Enlightenment reason seems to replace myth with science and natural laws. Nature is brought under the control of enlightened humans, who use reason to predict natural events and develop technology to dominate first external nature and eventually also internal human nature and other human beings.<sup>81</sup> The essence of civilization is domination of human and non-human nature, the society of human beings and individual selves. There are two key aspects that I want to introduce briefly: the conception of enlightenment reason and the thesis of the loss of personality.

In DE, reason is conceived of exclusively as instrumental reason which aims at emancipation through domination. It liberates humanity from fear and the real threat of the forces of nature through gaining control over all spheres of life. Oppression is understood as helplessness or impotence in the face of nature, which is overcome only by reliably gaining power over nature.<sup>82</sup> But “knowledge, which is power, knows no [limits], neither in the enslavement of men nor in its compliance with the world’s rulers. . . . What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate it and other men”.<sup>83</sup> Internal to instrumental knowledge and reason and our need to exercise control in order to be free from the threats of nature is a drive towards total domination. Instrumental reason involves a particular kind of thinking: “identity thinking”. Identity thinking abstracts from particular concrete events and objects to that which objects and events share, the identity of types. These types are then brought into relations of equivalence. Equivalence is also manifested in the capitalist system of exchange, which depends on that form of thinking, and it is at the root of laws of nature. The idea here is reminiscent of the idea of a universal science with a universal language (maths) that Horkheimer mentions in his 1937 essay. Identity thinking is how any conceptual thought proceeds. Concepts are formed by strip-

ping objects and events of their particularity. Particularity is denied.<sup>84</sup> Enlightenment reasoning is inextricably linked to domination, and insofar as the sciences, including the sociological sciences, rely on identity thinking too, they are complicit in domination. At the very least, this renders them highly suspect for emancipatory purposes. A theme throughout the dialectic is the link Adorno and Horkheimer make between this way of thinking and the horrors of Third Reich. The barbarism is seen as violent enactment of the annihilation of difference and hence particularity in enlightenment patterns of thought. Instrumental reason is also involved in the economic structure and domination of classes. So, enlightenment reason liberates us by initiating a process of civilization that will culminate either in a system of total domination through fascism and the physical destruction of otherness or (state—totally administered or liberal) in capitalism, with more “subtle” forms of ensuring conformity.

In contrast to identity thinking, Adorno and Horkheimer posit “mimesis”. Mimesis aims at becoming or re-creating the event or object in question. It preserves particularity but does not lend itself to the formulation of laws. While—on Honneth’s reading especially—Adorno and Horkheimer attribute emancipatory potential to mimesis, mimesis also aims at domination. Adorno and Horkheimer describe pre-enlightenment rituals aimed at appeasing the gods, for example, in terms of mimesis. Moreover, mimesis is also one of the central mechanisms involved in anti-Semitism. It should be noted that Adorno and Horkheimer eventually call the type of mimesis which involves the projection of one’s own shortcomings onto others, “false mimesis”. It is false mimesis which is at the root of anti-Semitic attitudes.<sup>85</sup> Mimesis originates in the capacity to suffer, and it is this origin which means mimesis can become a tool of domination and of liberation. In modernity, mimesis is the language of art and is opposed to identity thinking, which constitutes the language of science. Mimesis, in preserving the particular and resisting abstraction, is also the mode in which human beings can exist “in the here and now”,<sup>86</sup> the mode in which they can relate to actual particular events, people and objects in the particular moment. Given that alienation from the here and now, through constant focus on the future, implicit in enlightenment reason and the structure of capitalist societies, is a factor in both human estrangement and total domination, mimesis possesses the capacity to alleviate alienation.<sup>87</sup> Insofar as the later Adorno allows for any glimmer of emancipatory hope, it rests in the resistance of mimesis to play a functional role in the domination through instrumental reason and in its protection of particularity. However, it does little to help humanity survive in the face of natural forces. There is no concept formation, no conceptual thought in mimesis. But conceptual thought is necessary to coordinate actions and build civilization, such that survival against nature is possible. Mimesis remains restricted to the realm of art, where there can be moments of resistance, of the sensual experi-

ence of the here and now and the other. The problem diagnosed in the DE, which contributes to the pessimistic prognoses or the “regressive thesis” or “regressive anthropogenesis”,<sup>88</sup> is precisely the fact that the dominating instrumental enlightenment reason is required for human self-preservation and thus for emancipation; yet it urges towards total domination.

In addition to the dominating nature of reason, Adorno and Horkheimer affirm the “loss of personality” thesis, introduced by Horkheimer in his 1937 essay. This thesis ultimately leads to a loss of an agent of emancipation or even a subjectively experienced interest in emancipation. Underlying this thesis is a narrow view of the development of a superego only through identification with the strong father figure, which will be a source of criticism for Honneth in the next chapter. In DE the “loss of father figure” thesis is complemented by an account of the self-alienation of individuals and the resulting loss of individuality through abstraction. This loss of individuality due to a systemic attack on sensuality and particularity is a theme throughout DE and in turn is complemented by outlining the demands of fascist systems against individuality and hence otherness.<sup>89</sup> In the absence of a personality that could resist incoming information, the culture industry plays an essential role in total domination. The culture industry achieves conformity by training sense-perception and dumbing down rational faculties. Where the formation and maintenance of the bourgeois ego is seen as an “ongoing” strain, an act of self-domination but an act of self-domination especially in the face of the experience of sensuality,<sup>90</sup> the ever sameness and comfortable familiarity of cultural products, ranging from Hollywood movies to easy-listening music, neither invites original sensual experience nor otherwise stimulates reason. The culture industry thus stimulates a process of regression of our faculties, including critical faculties. Needless to say, the culture industry is well integrated into the economic system by directly producing the kind of population required and by affording producers the possibility for huge profits.<sup>91</sup>

This extremely abbreviated account should serve to show several things. By 1947, Adorno and Horkheimer have come to the conclusion that the project of a Critical Theory as originally conceived cannot be continued in the society they find. While they make use of psychoanalytic theories, the results of social research would have to be treated with such great suspicion that the original dialectic relationship between different disciplines has to be more or less abandoned. Social sciences are now in the service of domination. Worse than that, the very tool and essence of emancipation, reason, is actually the source of domination and oppression and finds its realisation not in a rationally organised society in which all individual needs and wants are integrated but in a rationally organised society in which individuality is eliminated. Conceptual thought is not a reliable tool for emancipation, but neither are non-conceptual thought and sensuality, which, by themselves, can provide but moments of reprieve; they cannot coordinate emancipatory action.

There is no beyond domination and—as their account of mimesis shows—no before domination. As indicated at the beginning of this section, Adorno and Horkheimer believe this diagnosis to be essentially true of the postwar and post-fascist society of 1969, probably because fascist methods of domination are not the only means of domination they diagnose. The influence of the culture industry, the erosion of individuality and alienation from the here and now through consumption of ever-same cultural products is now more widespread and pervasive in their eyes. This is the context in which Habermas re-embraces and reconceives the original project.

#### 1.4. HABERMAS: KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST

Habermas is considered to be one of the key figures of the second generation of Critical Theorists and is influential for Honneth.<sup>92</sup> It is impossible to do justice to Habermas even in one entire book; moreover, core aspects of his theory (insofar as their critique forms part of Honneth's own project) will be one of the topics in the next chapter. In this section, I want to focus exclusively on Habermas's conception of the project of a Critical Theory, which he outlines in his inaugural lecture. Habermas reappraises the programme of a critical social theory with emancipatory aims and a normative dimension. As opposed to his predecessors, Habermas's approach is marked by increased differentiation of different types of knowledge, different types of interest and different types of rationality and action. The formulation of a second type of rationality, which operates alongside instrumental reason that has been the target of DE, allows Habermas to locate a space for emancipation. These differences enable a revival of Horkheimer's programme in a modified way. However, there are important similarities between Habermas and the first generation.<sup>93</sup> Like his predecessors, Habermas understands an emancipated society as a society in which its members rationally deliberate and plan the organisation and structure of society. The emancipated society is thus also a rational society, but Habermas will spend more time on formulating standards of this social rationality and procedures of emancipatory public deliberation and discourse.

Like Horkheimer and Marcuse, Habermas insists on the rootedness of knowledge and science in interest, but he provides a much more detailed account of the different types of interests and their relation to knowledge. Already in his inaugural lecture in 1965 Habermas provides all the ingredients that will eventually form his mature theory. In this lecture he offers an account of the nature and foundation of a Critical Theory.<sup>94</sup> Empirical-analytic sciences, hermeneutical and critical sciences are ultimately rooted in interests. Even the most advanced and sophisticated methods that scientists develop to prevent the subjective desires, beliefs and interests of individual

researchers from influencing experimental results and theory do not amount to a separation of knowledge from interest.<sup>95</sup> Habermas distinguishes here between “subjective interests”, whose falsifying impact might be prevented by safeguarding procedures, and “fundamental interests”, which are the very source of scientific enquiry.<sup>96</sup> Further, he distinguishes between three different types of fundamental interests: a technical-cognitive interest, which guides the empirical-analytic sciences and is linked to technological domination of nature; a practical interest, which drives the historical hermeneutic sciences; and an emancipatory interest out of which the critical sciences arise.<sup>97</sup> The different interests determine the different types of theories. Empirical-analytic sciences aim at theories that allow “predictive knowledge”, which in turn serves “technical employability”.<sup>98</sup> The propositions of these theories lend themselves to the formulation of experimental hypotheses which are tested in controlled conditions. These experimental observations, rather than disinterestedly recording facts, actually record success and failures of control and manipulation.<sup>99</sup> Thus not only the subject matter but also the method of theory formation and confirmation are driven by instrumental interests. Hermeneutical sciences drive at understanding through interpretative practices.<sup>100</sup> Hermeneutic sciences aim to come up with rules that allow us to determine the meaning of statements by understanding the conditions under which statements can be “valid”—that is, the rules that allow us to understand the conditions under which we should assent to a statement.<sup>101</sup> Lastly, the critical sciences must engage in “self-reflection”,<sup>102</sup> as only self-reflection allows us to be aware of the influence of interests on knowledge and theory and to thus compensate for that influence.<sup>103</sup>

The fundamental interests operate at the level of fundamental methodological decisions, which are neither logically deduced nor empirically driven nor arbitrary. These fundamental decisions about methods and standards in the different areas of knowledge (empirical-analytic, hermeneutic and critical) are “appropriate” to the non-arbitrary interests out of which the areas of knowledge themselves arise. These interests stem from our nature as human beings.<sup>104</sup> As human beings, we are distinguished from other species by a lack of specialisation of organs.<sup>105</sup> This lack of specialisation means that human beings have to form societies to defend themselves against the forces of nature in the interest of self-preservation. Within societies, problems of action coordination and the question of the aims of particular societies arise. Societies must find or create a shared understanding of “the good life”, as it requires shared values.<sup>106</sup> Here, a common understanding also of historical practices and hence communication become essential. In societies, action coordination takes place through work, language and power, where power is a non-consensual steering mechanism which undermines or at least circumvents the rational capacities of individuals and can thus threaten the autonomy of individuals.<sup>107</sup> The development of language is of particular interest to

Habermas, as he thinks it is oriented towards consensus.<sup>108</sup> Language plays a key role for Habermas's mature theory, and we can find a clear indication of the direction of his theory in his inaugural lecture. Some forms of action coordination require communication, and communication aims at “universal and unconstrained” consensus, which in turn respects the autonomy of individuals.<sup>109</sup> For Habermas, this orientation towards free consensus is a universal feature of language and it forms the normative ground of his Critical Theory. Communication aimed at consensus requires that participants are able to freely and rationally assent (or dissent), which in turn requires the formation of autonomous (and responsible) agents. At the same time, communication aimed at free consensus enables ego formation, especially the development of autonomy and responsibility.

“However, only in an emancipated society, whose members’ autonomy and responsibility had been realised would communication have developed into the non-authoritarian and universally practiced dialogue from which both our model of reciprocally constituted ego identity and our idea of true consensus are always implicitly derived”.<sup>110</sup>

We will engage with his communicative theory and his reliance on universal pragmatics in more detail in the next chapter. For now, what matters is that Habermas traces the different types of fundamental interest—that is, technical cognitive, practical and emancipatory interests, back to our species’ interest in self-preservation. The anthropological view of the nature of the human species as organically under-specialised, and hence dependent, is important to make plausible the idea that we naturally have practical interests—that is, interests in action coordination which essentially involves our ability to interpret the meaning of both utterances and traditions (of action orientation). The hermeneutic—practical—interests are no less natural than our technical cognitive interests. Our emancipatory interests are deeply intertwined with our dependency on and life in societies, the need for action coordination and the social conditions of and need for self-formation.<sup>111</sup> It follows from this account of the nature of theory and its relation to interest that we cannot have interest-free knowledge. Moreover, the fundamental interests themselves, grounded in the interest of self-preservation of the species, are not *per se* problematic. What is problematic is the “false consciousness” prevalent in positivist sciences, the illusion of interest-free, objective theories and methods.<sup>112</sup> Habermas links this false consciousness to an idea of “ideology”. One task of Critical Theory, as self-reflective theory, is to expose ideology and uncover the interest underlying it and other theories. But this task is part of the broader emancipatory role that Critical Theory is to play. In other words, Critical Theory is theory that is rooted in the emancipatory interest and it must gain knowledge of the conditions for emancipation as well as insight into the distortive or oppressive mechanisms. Ideology, which is linked to the appearance of necessity, is one such mechanism.<sup>113</sup>

Like Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, Habermas holds that domination of nature is necessary for human survival and so must be a part of an emancipated society. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas links technology and instrumental reason to domination but Habermas does not think that this is a problem.<sup>114</sup> Instrumental reason is not the only type of reason there is. Rationalisation also means a differentiation of different domains of knowledge and different types of reason. As we will see in much more detail in the next chapter, Habermas distinguishes between instrumental reason and communicative reason. Communicative reason is the rationality that aims at free consensus and thus the type of rationality also involved in the creation of a rational society. It is associated with emancipatory, communicative action. Because domination of nature is necessary for human survival and because we have developed into highly sophisticated societies with sophisticated needs and wants, a rational society will always require a social sphere where actions are guided by highly effective non-consensual means—that is, money and power. This social sphere, the system, obeys rules that are independent of the consent of participants. The types of reason operative in the system are instrumental reason, aimed at the manipulation of objects, and strategic reason, aimed at the manipulation of subjects. Habermas distinguishes the system from another sphere, the lifeworld. In the lifeworld we deliberate and decide about the structure, nature and ends of our societies. In an emancipated society, these deliberations in the lifeworld ought to be guided by communicative reason. Habermas diagnoses problems where non-consensual mechanisms interfere with the lifeworld.<sup>115</sup> This specific account is problematic on various levels, and we will engage with some of those problems in the next chapter. However, this theory illustrates that Habermas seems to have re-opened a theoretical space for emancipation by providing a highly differentiated and thorough account of the nature and types of interest-knowledge relations, the very issue that has motivated Horkheimer's essay on traditional and Critical Theory.<sup>116</sup>

## NOTES

1. For a detailed account and discussion, see Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*.
2. Horkheimer, “Die gegewrtige Lage”, 20, transl. mine: “[Als ihr letztes Ziel gilt danach] die philosophische Deutung des Schicksals der Menschen, insofern sie nicht bloss Individuen, sondern Glieder einer Gemeinschaft sind”.
3. Horkheimer, “Die gegewrtige Lage”, 21.
4. “Die gegewrtige Lage”.
5. “Die gegewrtige Lage”, 22.
6. “Die gegewrtige Lage”, 23–24.
7. “Die gegewrtige Lage”, 23.

8. “Die gegenwärtige Lage”, 25–26. The only exception Horkheimer acknowledges is Heidegger, for whom “human being is only being towards death”, 26, transl. mine (“menschliches Sein ist . . . nur das Sein zum Tode”).

9. Horkheimer lists but a few options, ranging from the *Volksgeist* (spirit of a people), which National Socialism will refer to, to essences, totality, absolute moral value and so on.

10. “Die gegenwärtige Lage”, 27.

11. The initial project Horkheimer announces as an example of the kind of grand programme he has in mind is a project in which statistical data and qualitative research (questionnaires, but also literature and culture in the broadest sense) are psychologically and sociologically analyzed in order to trace the influence of economic conditions on changes in the psychological structure of skilled workers and employees in Germany in the early in the 1930s. At this point, Horkheimer seems to think that the interdisciplinary projects have to be narrowly defined (specific feature in specific group at specific time and place) to allow thorough empirical analysis. Horkheimer, “Die gegenwärtige Lage”, 33–35.

12. In this vein, one way in which Critical Theory responds to changed social circumstances might be by reconsidering the selection of core subjects, as we will see in the last chapter.

13. Fred Rush focuses more on the difference in systematicity requirements (Rush, “Conceptual Foundations of Early Critical Theory”, 13).

14. Horkheimer, “Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie” (TKT), 207.

15. TKT, 205.

16. TKT, 207.

17. TKT, 206.

18. TKT, 214.

19. TKT, 208–9.

20. “manipulation of physical nature” and “economic and social mechanisms”, transl. mine, TKT, 211; original: “Handhabung der physischen Nature” and “ökonomische und soziale Mechanismen”.

21. TKT, 227; English edition (hereafter E), 210.

22. TKT, 225–27, 246; E, 207–10, 230.

23. Transl. mine, TKT, 227; E, 211.

24. TKT, 227; E, 210.

25. Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse all appreciate, of course, that human emancipation requires (human) survival in nature. There is thus a kind or degree of domination of nature that is necessary for emancipation and might even be seen to constitute a form of emancipation.

26. TKT, 223; E, 206.

27. TKT, 216–17; E, 199–200.

28. TKT, 217; E, 200.

29. TKT, 217; E, 202. The idea that we order sense input to fit our conceptual frameworks even before we are aware of those inputs—that is, accounts of conceptually driven perception—finds uptake in empirical psychology and is not at all specific to Critical Theory.

30. TKT, 217, 218; E, 204.

31. TKT, 222; E, 206.

32. TKT, 217–18; E, 201.

33. TKT, 248.

34. TKT, 225. Horkheimer’s target of critique here might well have been Karl Mannheim.

35. However, Herbert Marcuse will develop a Freudo-Marxism in which psychoanalytic theory is used to diagnose and cure social wrongs. Horkheimer and Adorno also, as we will see below, refer to psychoanalytic theory in order to understand some of the wrongs of their contemporary societies. Later on, Habermas and Honneth and some (though not all by far) other contemporary Critical Theorists, such as Seyla Benhabib, also give a prominent position to psychoanalysis.

36. TKT, 247.

37. TKT, 246–47; E, 231.

38. TKT, 232; E, 215.

39. TKT, 238; E, 221. The Horkheimer of the 1937 essay is still markedly more Marxist than the later Horkheimer. While he does not subscribe to the idea that the proletariat has

realized universal consciousness, he at this point still ascribes revolutionary potential to an oppressed class—if it manages to survive as a class in late capitalism.

40. TKT, 233–34; E, 217–18.
41. TKT, 233–34; E, 217–18.
42. TKT, 251–52; E, 236.
43. The idea, which we find again in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, discussed below, is that the strong bourgeois father figure—that is, the father who exerts power in the economic and political world, whose decisions and rules are effective in the world—disappears due to the paradigm shift. In the new capitalism the decisions of individual capitalist (owners) are no longer a determining force, the new order is shaped by big corporations or the state, in which managers follow procedures. The loss of power in the world leads to a loss of the father figure as the psychological force behind the genesis of the “superego”, a force that allows individuals to form moral beliefs and principles which might contradict those of the masses. The idea is highly problematic in various aspects and will be discussed in much more detail in section 1.3.
44. TKT, 254; E, 237.
45. TKT, 257–59, 223–24; E, 241–43, 217.
46. TKT, 220–21.
47. See Horkheimer, “Postscript”, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*; see also Rush, “Conceptual Foundations of Early Critical Theory”, esp. 12–13.
48. TKT, 265–68; E, 248–51.
49. Marcuse, “The Concept of Essence” (CE), 56.
50. CE, 57.
51. CE, esp. 53, 46, 63–64.
52. Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory” (PCT), 99–100.
53. PCT, 104.
54. CE, 56.
55. PCT, 100, 107.
56. PCT, 100, 108.
57. For example, CE, 41; PCT, 99–100.
58. Marcuse’s creative adoption of Freud’s notion of the “reality principle” and the idea of psychic energy, which is divided up between a life-affirming drive and a destructive drive (Eros and Thanatos respectively), leads him to formulate a complex theory of repression. For Marcuse, the specific form of “reality principle” is historically determined. In capitalism, the reality principle, which demands repression and delay of desire gratification in order to facilitate civilised social life, in Freud, becomes a “performance principle”. The performance principle requires repression of all desires whose gratification does not contribute to higher economic productivity. All of our energy is to be devoted to productivity. This surplus of repression causes a surplus of aggression and feeds the destructive drive (Thanatos). The surplus of aggression is systemically desirable because the aggression is released in forms of external repression (military aggression, police aggression and all sorts of micro-aggressions that serve conformity, as well as wars, which serve the exploitative tendencies of late capitalist affluent societies). Moreover, it facilitates participation in a capitalist system which is marked by aggressive competition and assertion (e.g. Marcuse’s “Repressive Tolerance”). This appropriation of psychoanalysis is highly controversial and the detail lacks plausibility but the overall image of internalized economic demands, increased repression and aggressive potentials allows Marcuse to identify possible paths to emancipation.
59. PCT, 106; see also CE, 53.
60. PCT, 116.
61. PCT, 113.
62. PCT, 113–14.
63. CE, 33–47, 59.
64. The bourgeois, or idealist, conception of human essence as thinking and abstract freedom is true insofar as this conception of abstract freedom picks out the only type of freedom possible in bourgeois capitalism. It thus responds “truthfully” to impediments to human emancipation, but it fails to pick out the essence of human beings or freedom—as we shall see below. It only “comprehends man as he actually exists in the bourgeois epoch” (CE, 59).

65. CE, 58.

66. CE, 49. Part of the value of Critical Theory is that it is determined by a “general interest”; an interest in the actual emancipation of all human beings to be realized in the changed material conditions of humanity, rather than by the particular interests of powerful groups or an interest only in “universal validity” in the realm of thought (CE, 56).

67. CE, 60.

68. CE, 60.

69. CE, 60.

70. CE, 60–61.

71. CE, 63.

72. CE, 62–63.

73. CE, 62.

74. CE, 52.

75. PCT, 102.

76. PCT, 112.

77. We can see the complex attitude Marcuse has towards philosophy in “The Concept of Essence” as well, where he works out his conception of essence based on the insights as well as the perceived errors of earlier conceptions from ancient philosophy on.

78. Honneth, “The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society”.

79. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (DE), xi.

80. DE, 12.

81. DE, 3.

82. The fear of nature or, better yet, the fear of impotence also gives rise to “pathological projection” (DE, esp. 187–97). Pathological projection, among other things, projects a rigidity and fixedness on the external world which does not really belong to it (DE, 188), but pathological projection also underlies anti-Semitism.

83. DE, 4.

84. See, for example, DE, 7–8, 21–22.

85. DE, 183–87.

86. DE, 10.

87. DE, 10.

88. See also Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, 71.

89. See, for example, DE, 198–202. A good example of the hostility towards individuality is Adorno’s account of “smell”. Smell is a dangerous sensation, since, unlike other forms of sensation, it is all encompassing (it even invites oneself to become the other) and so does not afford a hold in the realm of abstraction (DE, 184). It should also be noted that hostility towards the “other” is also hostility towards individuality, as individuality would be the other to the abstract image of conformist identity.

90. See, for example, DE, 58–60.

91. See, for example, DE, 120–67.

92. It is important to point out that Habermas does not consider himself as second-generation Frankfurt School, and it might in any case be inappropriate to talk about a “Frankfurt School” as one more or less homogeneous school of thought that links different generations, though there are also good reasons to group some of these theorists together as involved in a similar project (see, for example, Anderson, “Situating Axel Honneth in the Frankfurt School Tradition”; Müller-Doohm, “Member of a School or Exponent of a Paradigm?” and also below).

93. I am not here interested in the question of whether these similarities suffice to speak of a “Frankfurt School”. They are sufficient to identify a common approach to social philosophy, which is what matters to me here. This approach might not be co-extensive with all the research programmes undertaken by members of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and also might not be exclusive even to (some of) these members. But those members of the institute, as well as Habermas and Honneth, exemplify the best approach and in increasingly sophisticated ways.

94. Instead of taking Descartes as a point of departure, Habermas constructs his account in contrast to Husserl’s “The Crisis of the European Sciences”. While Habermas agrees with

Husserl's critique of positivism, as we shall see below, he charges Husserl himself with ignoring the inextricable link between knowledge and fundamental (rather than purely subjective) interest.

95. Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests" (KHI), 311–12.

96. KHI, 311.

97. KHI, 308.

98. KHI, 308.

99. KHI, 308–9.

100. I will have to ignore here Habermas's critique of historicism and other types of positivist hermeneutic science, which proceed in ways similar to the empirical-analytic sciences (KHI, 309–10).

101. The notion of validity here differs from logical notions. Habermas distinguishes between different domains of discussion—for example, the social world, the objective world and the subjective world. Different "validity conditions" attach to these different types of statements, as we use different criteria to affirm or reject claims. For example, the criterion at work in the domain of the social world is "rightness", in the objective world it is "truth" and in the subjective world it is "sincerity".

102. KHI, 310.

103. KHI, 314.

104. KHI, 312.

105. Habermas follows Arnold Gehlen here, much like Honneth and Joas later. See, for example, Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*.

106. KHI, 312–13.

107. KHI, 313. However, in his mature theory, power and money, the two non-consensual steering systems, have an important place in the system. They become problematic and threaten autonomy when they begin to be effective in the lifeworld—that is, the sphere of social life that ought to be organised through consensual discourse.

108. KHI, 314.

109. KHI, 314.

110. KHI, 314. Interestingly, here Habermas makes the judgement of the truth of statements or claims raised in communication depended on future societies (who would in a free communication settle "validity claims"). The projected future emancipated society then becomes the standard of critique in early Habermas, much like in Horkheimer and Marcuse.

111. KHI, 314.

112. KHI, 315.

113. Habermas is very clear in several works about the oppressive impact that the appearance of necessity has on our communicative organisation of social life. Appeal to "Sachzwänge" plays a huge role in allowing economic steering mechanisms to organise our lifeworld. Sachzwänge are the justifications for deregulations of the labour market and disempowering of consumers (Habermas, *Europe: The Failing Project*).

114. Habermas here differs from Marcuse, because Marcuse holds that a non-dominating use of technology is possible, and he differs from Adorno and Horkheimer because, while all technology is involved in domination, technological domination does not have to lead to total domination.

115. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*.

116. It remains to be said that Habermas also re-embraces the interdisciplinary project and engages in sociological research himself (e.g. Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*).

## *Chapter Two*

# Honneth on Social Philosophy

Before turning to Axel Honneth's recognition theory, this chapter will provide an outline of the task he sets himself—that is, the nature and task of social philosophy, conceived as Critical Theory. Honneth does not initially identify as a Frankfurt School Critical Theorist; however, his understanding of the nature of social philosophy amounts to an updated version of the original project of the Frankfurt School. It includes a commitment to the core tenets. The chapter will begin with a sketch of Honneth's conception of the task and the role of social philosophy. It will then proceed to lay the ground for Honneth's realisation of that task in his recognition theory by analysing his critical appropriations and rejections of the first and second generation. His critique of his predecessors will be read as the first step towards a new Critical Theory of society.

### 2.1. SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND/AS CRITICAL THEORY

In “Pathologies of the Social”, Honneth states that “social philosophy is primarily concerned with determining and discussing processes of social development that can be viewed as misdevelopments . . . disorders or ‘social pathologies’”.<sup>1</sup> The focus on social processes and on social pathologies is one of the distinguishing marks of this approach. Honneth contrasts his conception with two other broad approaches, the approach typical of German social philosophy and the approach typical of “Anglo-Saxon” philosophy. In the context of German-speaking philosophy, social philosophy has become “residual”,<sup>2</sup> tasked with supplementing the empirical social sciences. Honneth explains this development with reference to the history of social philosophy and sociology. Whereas early social philosophers like Hegel could base their analysis of right social living on speculative metaphysics,

the arrival of sociology meant empirical methods replaced the justificatory role of metaphysics. Early sociologists are not merely empirical scientists; they also engage in normative critique. The aim of early sociology is to explain and overcome problems of modernity, specifically phenomena captured under terms like “alienation” or “reification”. But once classical sociology develops more into an empirical science, sociologists increasingly see themselves as scientists involved in collecting and explaining data non-normatively. The normative question is pushed aside to be addressed by social philosophy rather than science. Social philosophy occupies a strange position vis-à-vis the social sciences. Unlike the vision of early Critical Theory, social philosophy here does not stand in a dialectical relationship and is not part of an interdisciplinary project. Rather, social philosophy is seen to operate independently of the social sciences. In the post-metaphysical world, social philosophy can no longer plausibly involve metaphysical speculation but equally it maintains complete independence from empirical methods and empirical sciences.<sup>3</sup>

In the second approach, the Anglo-Saxon tradition, social philosophy is conceived as a sub-field of political philosophy. The “social question” concerns the legitimacy of state power. Consequently, social philosophy focuses on questions of legitimacy of social policies (e.g. healthcare), rather than questions about “right living”. In fact, binding conceptions of the “good life” are mostly avoided. Social philosophy is a branch of analytic political philosophy. The boundaries between both are fluid. The question of justice tends to be addressed through abstractly formulated, universal, principles. This kind of analytic political philosophy excludes concrete notions of the ethical life from its theory of justice. Justice is to be impartial between different conceptions of the good life.<sup>4</sup> However, this approach is problematic, because the level of abstractness combined with the perceived independence from empirical research and social experience are, on the one hand, suspicious and, on the other, such that might deem the enterprise of political philosophy practically irrelevant. The formulation of abstract principles that are universal and appear to be impartial is suspect in the context of the history of ideology critique, where claims to “objectivity” and “value neutrality” are often found to be complicit with dominant interests. This suspicion of “neutrality” is based also on the idea, introduced in chapter 1, that all theory is determined by interest. Moreover, highly abstract and abstractly formulated theories might be in danger of practical irrelevance because they do not engage in conversation with political actors. They fail to appeal to “their language”. Since political actors and political movements are neither the acknowledged source nor the object of ideal political philosophy, the two can easily drift apart.<sup>5</sup> I will discuss Honneth’s relationship to this type of political philosophy in detail in chapter 7.

In contrast to both conceptions outlined above, Honneth conceives of social philosophy as grounded in empirical reality. Insofar as social philosophy is concerned with justice, the conception of justice should not be derived independently from social reality. Because, according to Honneth, social philosophy should be concerned with “right living”, it must also contain conceptions of an ethical life. Honneth traces his social philosophy back to Rousseau, Hegel and Marx. Despite crucial difference between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Hegel, Honneth (plausibly) considers them to be involved in the same project: the identification and explanation of social mechanisms that block the possibility for individual members of a society to self-realise (or to “authentically” self-realise). While Rousseau, Hegel and Marx offer different accounts of the pathologies of their time, they have set themselves similar tasks: their theories aim to understand their own social reality and especially misdevelopments (broadly understood).

Especially for Hegel and Marx—albeit in very different ways—theory must be committed to emancipation. In that sense, it is plausible to read Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, as a form of emancipation through therapeutic reconciliation. Philosophy helps to overcome what Hegel identifies as one of the main pathologies of his time—the indeterminacy of subjective freedom—by showing that freedom requires community with others and thus reconciling ourselves with society or the state through creating a proper understanding of freedom and flourishing.<sup>6</sup> Marx rejects the reconciliatory nature of Hegel on various grounds, most pressingly because it does not alleviate actual embodied suffering. According to Marx, Hegel’s reconciliation with the institutions of society amounts to a reconciliation with the status quo, including with unnecessary human suffering. Due to their different accounts of what prevents flourishing in their societies, they propose different remedies. Since for Marx only material social change—that is, change of the structures of society (and especially the organisation of labour)—can alleviate suffering, theory must be connected to action. From the left-Hegelian lineage, we can draw conclusions about the nature of the social philosophy that Honneth has in mind: it purports to understand the society of its own time and thus must be historically reflexive. It is aimed at human emancipation or flourishing and so must understand those features of the organisation of society that prevent said emancipation. Honneth rejects a Hegelian metaphysics and also focuses on the material structure of society. Consequently, a good grasp of the mechanisms of oppression and of emancipatory needs and interests requires a dialectic relation with other, empirical, disciplines (e.g. economics, sociology, psychology and political science). Further, the commitment to emancipation also means that social philosophy stands in a specific relation to social practice. It must be able to identify, explain and justify emancipatory practices and also be action guiding (and possibly inspire emancipatory practices). The third generation of the Frankfurt School ma-

tures in the context of the student movements and the so-called New Social Movements—for example, environmentalist, feminist, gay and queer movements.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising that the new social movements are in many ways an obvious candidate for locating emancipatory interests and actions.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the relation between social philosophy and practice is likely to also involve a relationship to social movements. Explaining and, when appropriate, justifying social movements, as well as the diagnosis of “social wrongs”, requires a normative standard, a standpoint of diagnosis or critique. In his short article “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect” Honneth reconstructs the history of the Frankfurt School as a series of attempts to normatively ground a critical social philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

Following a tradition of thought from Marx to Horkheimer, Honneth holds that the normative dimension of a social philosophy must be located “within social reality”.<sup>10</sup> The “intramundane transcendence”, the experience of everyday social life that points beyond itself and possesses “normative surplus”, is what social philosophy should locate and explicate as normative foundation. There are various reasons to insist on this link to social reality. For one, it prevents Rawlsian constructivism—that is, the formulation of abstract principles derived independently from social reality. Constructivism, in turn, is, on the one hand, in constant danger of supporting the status quo while assuming the guise of neutrality (of being an ideology) and, on the other hand, in danger of being practically irrelevant. Locating normativity in social experience might provide a plausible account of moral or emancipatory motivation. Theory that is rooted in experience also preserves the unity between theory and action. If those experiences that motivate social action are also those that possess a normative surplus, locating and explicating those experiences helps to explain social action and social movements and justify them normatively. As indicated above, locating normativity in everyday social experience also guarantees the relevance of the normative theory to everyday experience and everyday political, social and moral discourse.

Of course, as we will see in the following chapters, not every (subjective) experience is normatively valuable, and one task for Honneth is to provide criteria by which to distinguish the normatively relevant and valuable experiences from other experiences and to adjudicate between conflicting experiences or conflicting claims that result from different experiences.

Overall, Honneth’s conception of “social philosophy” looks very much like the core of the original project of the Frankfurt School. Indeed, while hesitant about identifying with this tradition at first, Honneth is regarded as one of the key thinkers of the third generation. His critical relation to the first two generations is informative of his project, which is formulated in response to problems he identifies in his predecessors (and alternatives). I will now turn to consider his critique of Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas as well as his critical appropriation of aspects of Foucault’s thought.

## 2.2. HONNETH AND THE FIRST GENERATION

While Honneth states explicitly that the project of the Frankfurt School cannot be continued “in an unmodified form”,<sup>11</sup> he is committed to the programme which Horkheimer outlines in his 1937 article (“Traditional and Critical Theory”—that is, to an interdisciplinary Critical Theory about society which is self-reflective, intimately linked with social activity (emancipatory action) and normatively binding. The theory must be able to identify and explain causes and mechanisms of oppression (all structures and processes that prevent emancipation), and it must also find in social reality possibilities of emancipation. It must identify the need and interest in emancipation in the lived experience of social reality as well as conceive of the possibility of emancipatory action.

In his critique of the first generation, Honneth identifies those “theoretical mistakes” that prevent the core members of the first generation from formulating an emancipatory Critical Theory of society that is related to social practice in the required sense and contains a normative dimension that is capable of serving as a standard of critique and is rooted in social reality. The loss of the emancipatory dimension is Honneth’s key criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer. This loss means that their analysis in the end is disconnected from social practice, as there is no room for emancipatory social action and/or practice. Honneth traces this loss back to two errors: a mistaken view of subjectivity that denies any room for social action and the reduction of effective rationality to instrumental reason.

In *The Critique of Power* (CoP), Honneth reconstructs the development of the critical thought of Horkheimer and Adorno from Horkheimer’s early articles to Adorno’s later texts. Honneth’s reconstruction allows him to identify both the potential of a Critical Theory, which he himself endeavours to realise in his own theory, and the failures of the first generation. The early Horkheimer conceives of a Critical Theory as originating in social practice, which it transforms in return.<sup>12</sup> This “critical activity” originates in the experience of injustice. It is a group-specific activity in which members of oppressed groups come together to communicatively interpret their social realities. The aim of critical activity is “the intensification of the struggle” for emancipation.<sup>13</sup> Critical activity is emancipatory action which facilitates knowledge of social wrongs and engages in struggle. The link between critical activity, experiences of injustice and specific groups also shows an understanding about social diversity. Different groups of people are differently affected by the way society, especially social labour, is structured. These different experiences lead to “varying perspectives”, which in turn lead to conflict.<sup>14</sup> The communicative insight of the early Horkheimer is not limited to critical activity. Horkheimer’s early conception of culture is also intersubjectivist and communicative. Culture is the “third dimension of social repro-

duction”,<sup>15</sup> alongside the economic and psychosocial spheres. “Culture” here is a broad notion which includes the arts but beyond it also includes leisure activities, clubs, fashion and so on.<sup>16</sup> Culture refers to those activities that create a shared normative self-understanding and so form the bond of a group or society.<sup>17</sup> The normative self-understanding, which includes backward-looking shared interpretations of history and forward-looking shared goals as well as values, is institutionalised in those “cultural activities”.<sup>18</sup>

The possible social theory that Honneth detects in the early Horkheimer is one which conceives of social reproduction in terms of social labour and the domination of nature for material survival, as well as in terms of communicative, cultural action. Progress could be explained in terms of social struggles and increase of technological knowledge. In other words, Honneth detects traces of a communicative view of social action in Horkheimer’s accounts of critical activity.<sup>19</sup>

However, this view of social reproduction stands in tension with Horkheimer’s commitment to a functionalist Marxist philosophy of history which conceives of social reproduction exclusively in terms of economic activity (social labour rather than social action).<sup>20</sup> Within such a functionalist approach, communicative formations of self-understanding and social action (based on communicative relations between subjects) have no serious role to play.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, Honneth argues, the commitment to this particular history of philosophy wins out and the communicative conception of the social is abandoned in favour of an institutional account of culture which leaves no room for cultural action or critical activity. For the interdisciplinary project, that means that political economy is core science; the task of psychology is to explain the creation of obedient producers.<sup>22</sup>

Added to the theoretical pressure from a commitment to a philosophy of history according to which social change is driven by changes in the forces of production is the experience of the rise and ultimate success of various totalitarian systems. Especially the rise and nature of the Nazis in Germany leads to a further, more resolute, abandonment of conceptions of social action. Horkheimer and Adorno’s attempt to explain the success of fascism partly through the thesis of the “loss of personality”<sup>23</sup> and partly through their notion of “enlightenment rationality” leads to an account of society and the social in which subjects are rendered into passive vessels controlled by a totally administered society.

The “loss of personality” thesis, briefly introduced in chapter 1, is strongly influenced by Frommian psychoanalysis and Pollock’s idea of state capitalism. It claims to identify a shift in self-formation from bourgeois society to post-liberal capitalist societies. In bourgeois capitalism, the self is formed through identification with and in relation to a strong father figure, the bourgeois patriarch. This strong head of a family is seen as a free agent in the external sphere, where his choices have impact. The identification with this

father figure as well as obedience to his laws allow subjects to form a superego and hence a conscience. The subjects of bourgeois capitalism possess personality in the sense that they have an internal moral orientation (the internalised father), which they regard as authoritative and which in turn enables them to resist total domination. However, subjects in post-liberal capitalism do not possess the free agency of the bourgeois patriarch and so there is no “strong father figure”, nor is it required anymore.<sup>24</sup> The loss of the father figure means that subjects in post-liberal or “state capitalism” cannot successfully form a conscience. Consequently, these subjects have no means to resist, and thus self-formation is directly controlled by state institutions and administrative processes.<sup>25</sup> The self is now formed through internalisation of state and market values, hence in and through conformity. Without a strong father figure, no superego; without superego, no moral backbone and no capacity to resist.

The loss of personality thesis is the beginning of the loss of emancipatory potential. The thesis is complemented by a change in the conception of “culture”. Where culture in the early Horkheimer is a sphere of the formation of (normative) self-understanding through communicative interaction, so a possible sphere of resistance, Horkheimer, increasingly influenced by Adorno, in the end embraces the latter’s idea of culture as “mass culture” or “culture industry”. Now, culture is one of the key tools of mass control. Culture is a means of control—and of social integration—by influencing the beliefs, hopes and visions of the mass audiences directly.<sup>26</sup> As Honneth points out, in the absence of a communicative notion of culture, which would allow the messages of culture products to become a subject of critical discourse and so to be mediated, these messages are now encountered in unmediated manner by recipients (who lack the ability to resist).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, culture industry reinforces mass conformity, since everyone consumes the same cultural products in the same manner. This consumption of cultural products, designed to be easily accessible by repeating familiar schemes, induces cognitive passivity as well as allowing a binding and discharge of emotions. Both cognitive passivity and emotional discharge can be explained with reference to Adorno’s notion of “regression”. For one, regression in the experience of culture products means that, due to the way in which culture is produced, consumption of culture requires no intellectual effort. Everything is familiar enough. This eventually leads to a dulling down of our capacity itself; we regress to a stage where everything is (intellectually) half-digested for us.<sup>28</sup> Second, a “regression to narcissism” thesis also accounts for the emotional attachment and hysteria that surrounds pop idols as much as “charismatic” leaders. The regression-to-narcissism thesis operates in the context of the loss-of-personality thesis and the loss of the father figure and, hence, the superego. In the context of a loss of a superego in post-liberal capitalism, the individual loses not only the capacity to resist but also the capacity to

control their own instincts. Mass culture takes over the task of controlling instincts and so directs the libidinal drives towards objects like idols or leaders.<sup>29</sup>

So, the notion of culture that Honneth finds in the Horkheimer of the 1930s becomes increasingly replaced by the Adornian notion of mass culture or culture industry. In a twisted way, culture remains a medium for social integration, but now it no longer involves the active communicative engagement of subjects who form their self-understanding and understanding of norms and values through interaction. Rather, culture is a form of social control and domination.

This brief account of the culture industry also helps to show the reductive account of “social domination”, which is a further problem Honneth identifies in Adorno and Horkheimer. While they offer a “theory of domination”, they understand even social domination in terms of domination of nature.<sup>30</sup> Domination is undertaken by a subject and exerted on a passive object. This object is external nature as much as human nature and “the masses”. Adorno and Horkheimer understand social domination in terms of “privilege”, which is the (unjustified and unjustifiable) “coercive”<sup>31</sup> delegation of the burdens of labour to others and is at the root of all divisions of labour.<sup>32</sup> The exercise of privilege eventually creates the oppressed class, who are “obedient”. The class of the oppressed is conceived of as passive, obedient, controllable through instrumental means. Social control avails itself of the same kind of rationality and of technology (albeit a different one) as the control of nature. Similarly, the way in which subject-formation is conceived, both in bourgeois capitalism (exemplified in the Odysseus myth)<sup>33</sup> and in state capitalism, is in terms of instrumental control over (natural) aspects of self, such as instincts, desires and needs.<sup>34</sup> Pollock’s controversial notion of “state capitalism” makes sense within this view of domination: it presents the economic sphere as subjectless domination over subjects, which are conceived of as objects.

While Adorno and Horkheimer distinguish between different instruments of control—that is, control through economy state repression, culture industry and psychological forms of control—domination is always seen to be exercised by a subject against a passive object. There is no space for problematic and oppressive forms of intersubjective actions (for example, domination through consensual activity, forms of domination that result from individuals’ normative self-understanding and interpretation in intersubjective contexts, which are the appropriate subject of “ideology critique”). This account of domination is linked to the erroneous commitment to a subject-object scheme and the conception of (effective) reason as purely instrumental, mentioned above. Honneth already criticises subject-object schema in the book he co-authored with Hans Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature* (SAHN). Here the great advance of Ludwig Feuerbach is seen to be partly his

overcoming of the subject-object scheme in favour of an intersubjectivist scheme. The intersubjectivist turn is also an achievement of Habermas, as we will see below. The subject-object scheme Honneth and Joas criticise in SAHN is mostly one where subject formation is seen to develop from the interaction between subject and object rather than the interaction between subjects. In this subject-object relation, the object can be a thing in the external world or the self (the body, instincts). In Adorno and Horkheimer, the scheme does not just underlie subject formation; it is also applied generally.

The view of domination, together with the subject-object schema, explains the reductive notion of subjectivity. The individual subject is the result of domination. The self is a passive object of subjectless mechanisms of control—mostly through the culture industry and its effect on even the instinctual level of the personality. This view of domination in turn is linked with a reductive view of the nature of “enlightenment reason” as purely instrumental reason. In fact, instrumental reason is the source of domination. Enlightenment reason first needs to understand the external world in terms of relations of identity or equivalence in order to formulate laws that can then be used to dominate external nature. It then applies the same mechanism to internal (human) nature and society. Instrumental reasoning (in fact, any conceptual thought at all) is so intrinsically and inevitably linked with domination that this form of rationality cannot lead to liberation.<sup>35</sup>

While Honneth commits to the project outlined by Horkheimer, he rejects the mature notions of domination, subject-formation and the narrow view of rationality found in the mature and late works of Horkheimer and Adorno in order to keep open a space for emancipatory social action and the possibility of uncovering a normative dimension within social reality.

### 2.3. HONNETH AND THE SECOND GENERATION: HABERMAS

Honneth credits Habermas with a revival of the original, emancipatory programme of a critical social theory. Specifically, Honneth acknowledges the contribution Habermas makes by introducing an intersubjective, communicative conception of the social. The communicative aspect goes a long way to providing a normative foundation for critique, though, as we shall see, not the way Habermas suggests. However much indebted Honneth is to the intersubjectivist and communicative turns, he is critical of the “reified” distinction between system and lifeworld in terms of which Habermas understands the communicative dimension and his social critique.

Before discussing Honneth’s criticisms of Habermas, it makes sense to briefly recap those core elements of Habermas’s theory which form the basis of the core of Honneth’s critique.<sup>36</sup> Habermas distinguishes between system

and lifeworld partly in terms of the steering mechanisms that are operative in those two spheres. In the system, or the sub-systems state and economy, the behaviour of participants is coordinated through non-consensual means, ultimately money and power. In the lifeworld, agents coordinate their actions through discourse aimed at consensus. System and lifeworld are thus associated with different types of rationality. Strategic and instrumental rationality, which aim at domination of people and objects, respectively, are linked to the system. Instrumental rationality is involved in the use and development of technology employed for domination. Communicative rationality and communicative action are features of the lifeworld. Communicative rationality aims at free consensus about the “validity” of claims pertaining to different dimensions, which are truth, rightness and sincerity. Free consensus is reached in discourse without domination, in the “ideal speech situation”, where participants can make and challenge claims freely and equally. The validity of claims and arguments is settled according to the criteria that are communicatively set. The communicative sphere is linked to emancipation because in it subjects form, expand and maintain identity and autonomy.

For Habermas, both system (with its non-consensual steering mechanisms) and lifeworld are essential for social reproduction. The system with its (increasingly) efficient non-normative steering mechanisms is necessary for the material reproduction and technological progress of society. The lifeworld is necessary for symbolic reproduction and moral progress. Social pathologies and misdevelopments are not due to instrumental reason *per se*, but due to the “colonization of the lifeworld”, the expansion of system mechanisms—that is, non-consensual steering mechanisms—into the spheres of the lifeworld, family and the public sphere.

Importantly, the normative value of the lifeworld, and hence the normative foundation and the emancipatory hope of Habermas’s Critical Theory, seems to depend on the strict division of system and lifeworld, such that there is “communication without domination” in the lifeworld. It is, in other words, within the conception of communication—universal pragmatics—that Habermas locates the normative grounding of his theory.

### **2.3.1. The Role of Consent in Economic Sphere and State Administration**

Honneth rejects the notion of a strict system-lifeworld distinction, both because he argues that the distinction is implausible and because he also thinks that the distinction leads to negative consequences for the potency of a critical social theory. For one, Honneth argues that the economic sphere and the sphere of the state cannot plausibly be seen as independent of the normative consensus of participants. This is because within organisations there is always also a political-practical dimension which is built on consensus. The

way tasks are fulfilled, the shape and tasks of projects, the structure and nature of organisations themselves are ultimately determined by the consensus of participants. Here Honneth draws also on sociological studies of the structure of the workplace and organisations.<sup>37</sup> To some extent, Habermas might agree. As Honneth points out, in his early work, Habermas argues that communicative understanding and consensus must underlie all empirical-analytic scientific enterprises, which of course ultimately fall into the sphere of purposive-rational action, as they ultimately are concerned with domination.<sup>38</sup> It is because these practices themselves rely on consensus that Habermas can argue for the priority of communicative over purposive-rational action. But Honneth's criticism goes beyond the assumption of a fundamental communicative decision about the boundaries of the system. Honneth argues that empirical data suggest that the system is interwoven with communicative relations. In response, one might maintain that seemingly consensual agreements are not brought about by free communicative action (and so do not actually constitute free consensus) but by strategic action and prescription. Alternatively, one may accept that communicative relations are operative to some degree in sub-systems but insist that this does not affect the core of the Habermasian analysis: that normative and emancipatory dimensions are grounded in communicative action and communicative relations. Some of our actions should be coordinated communicatively, even if those actions do not perfectly map onto one distinct sphere. We could still engage in social critique and claim that whenever those communicative relations are undermined by the encroachment of non-consensual steering mechanisms, we are dealing with a social pathology or injustice or misdevelopment.

But this response underestimates the complexity of the disagreement that arises from the system-lifeworld distinction. For Honneth, as we will see below, this distinction is related to (and undermines) the emancipatory aspects of labour.

### **2.3.2. The Role of Domination in Discourse**

Possibly more worrying for the emancipatory enterprise is Honneth's critique of the "purity" of the communicative sphere.<sup>39</sup> Habermas posits a lifeworld that is independent and free from strategic and instrumental action.<sup>40</sup> This independence is important for the normative standing of the consensus or will formation as well as for the emancipatory nature of autonomy. Autonomy (and the self) is, after all, formed in intersubjective communicative action. If communicative action is pervasively "distorted" or affected by instrumental and strategic rationality, then subjects could not become autonomous in the sense in which autonomy is opposed to domination and oppression. Without autonomous agents as participants in communicative action, it is not

clear what normative value a consensus reached among unfree and oppressed subjects should have. Honneth objects to the view of a lifeworld which operates independently of strategic and instrumental processes because it ignores accounts of socialisation, where individuals are subject to “everyday domination”, even before they come to participate in communicative action.<sup>41</sup>

In the end, Honneth claims that the lifeworld-system distinction flies in the face of sociological accounts of the need for communicative understanding in (system-) organisations as well as insights into subject-formation, socialisation and the everyday exercise of social control and domination.<sup>42</sup>

### **2.3.3. Implications of the Lifeworld-System Distinction: Labour and Class Struggle**

According to Honneth, the commitment to the lifeworld-system distinction and the corresponding notion of labour have caused Habermas to overlook the emancipatory potential of labour, which we find, for example, in the early Marx. When Marx writes about the alienation of labour through the capitalist organisation of labour, he also offers an implicit account of the emancipatory value of labour.<sup>43</sup> This early Marxian account is close to the Hegelian view of labour. Labour is valuable because it can be a source of self-knowledge and it allows us to be in relation to others in a specific way. We can experience ourselves as enabling others to flourish by providing for their needs and be recognised for doing so. Honneth focuses increasingly on the cognitive aspect of labour. Labour for Honneth is a possible source for self-esteem because in labour we can display our skills to the benefit of all and experience recognition.<sup>44</sup> Labour as emancipatory in the cognitive sense means that the organisation of labour must be a target of social critique, especially when it prevents groups of people from gaining self-esteem through socially beneficial labour. The object of criticisms can then be the criteria of “social utility” or other features of the organisation of labour.<sup>45</sup> For Habermas, by contrast, labour cannot provide a standpoint of critique.

Similarly troubling for Honneth is the “de-activation of the class struggle” thesis.<sup>46</sup> This thesis is not unique to Habermas. We also find it in Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse.<sup>47</sup> In “Moral Consciousness and Class Domination”,<sup>48</sup> Honneth argues that effective participation in public discourse, which involves the presentation of arguments in the form of abstract principles and similar linguistic skills, is not equally open to all. Consequently, arguments in the public sphere do not exhaust moral arguments or legitimate moral sentiments. The article is a critique of Habermas’s procedural approach as much as it is of society. Honneth provides various reasons that explain group-specific forms of communicating moral sentiments. Based on studies in social and political theory, he claims that what he calls the “lower”

or “suppressed strata of society” do not experience a pressure to justify their social status, and hence the moral convictions that would legitimate privilege, and so are not forced to engage in abstract argument.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the education systems and the media prevent the articulation of class-specific experiences of injustice through “cultural exclusion” and “institutional individualization”.<sup>50</sup> Concrete experiences of injustice are shared by members of groups, but these experiences do not inform public discourse. Cultural exclusion, the exclusion of the articulation of some experiences of injustice, and institutional individualisation, which undermines in-group communicative relations, lead to an invisibility of class conflict. Moreover, the exclusion of groups from public discourse coupled with the focus on communicative action and the exclusion of labour as sources of normativity mean that Habermas is unable to even recognise as injustice those silenced experiences.

#### **2.3.4. The Source of Normativity: Recognition as Experience That Carries Normative Potential (Surplus)**

Habermas normatively grounds his theory in the conditions for reaching free consensus. These conditions are understood as “linguistic conditions”,<sup>51</sup> which hold universally and are “situation-independent and contextually neutral”.<sup>52</sup> “Universal Pragmatics” allows Habermas to formulate a universal normative standard of critique. Social pathologies and injustices are understood as distortions of communicative action. While Habermas may have identified a pre-theoretical normative source, Honneth thinks that, at the very least, this source is disconnected from our experience of injustice.<sup>53</sup> We experience domination or injustice not as a violation of linguistic rules but as a violation of “identity claims”. This separation of everyday experiences of social wrongs and the criteria of social rightness or wrongness is problematic for a Critical Theory. For one, it severs the link between theory and practice in important ways. This is not to say that there is no link between theory and practice. In fact, one of the advances of Habermas over Adorno is the re-introduction of emancipatory action.<sup>54</sup> Collective political action that aims to reduce the system’s distortions of communicative action or interference with the lifeworld constitutes emancipatory action. Theory is importantly related to such action insofar as theory contributes to the discourse and thus informs the free consensus reached about distortions, interference and means of emancipation. But Honneth aims at a more direct link between theory and action. Honneth thinks that the social movements that are to be explained and justified by theory should provide access to the normative dimension. For Honneth, insofar as these movements are motivated by experiences of violations of self-relation, they are motivated by the very experience that will serve as moral ground. But whereas it is plausible to assume that some social movements are motivated by experiences of disrespect and humiliation, it is

less plausible to hold that they are motivated by violations of universal rules about the conditions of linguistic understanding.

There is a further, epistemic, problem. Not only is universal pragmatics an unlikely candidate for political motivation, but it seems also that if wrongness is located in the violation of these rules, only those with privileged access to those rules can understand social wrongs. It is a form of elitism that seems to follow from the idea that the “social processes by which the linguistic rules of communicative understanding are developed” and understanding of this process and the rules “occur behind the backs of individuals”.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, the focus on linguistic rules is too narrow to capture all experiences of social wrong, injustice, pathology or misdevelopments. Possibly some of the most pressing experiences of oppression are excluded because they occur beyond the realm of discourse and communication.<sup>56</sup>

The focus on the experience of injustice, rather than the discourse over principles, motivates Honneth’s criticism of the normative grounding of Habermas’s theory. Already in CoP, Honneth notes the need for a more detailed account of intersubjectivity in the communicative model. In “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect”, the lack of depth forms part of a further critique of Habermas. Here, the issue is the grounding of normativity: When we experience a violation of normative principles (either an injustice or a pathology), our experience is not well captured in terms of a violation of linguistic rules governing discourse or communicative action.<sup>57</sup>

Honneth’s criticism of Habermas’s account of normativity leads him to locate the normative source in the experience of the violation of pre-theoretical intersubjective expectations. More precisely, social wrongs are (mostly) violations of relations of recognition. These violations are—most of the time—accompanied by negative emotional experiences, such as humiliation, shame or disrespect. For the early Honneth, the idea of embodiment plays an important role; it allows us to experience violations in our intersubjective relations emotionally, to feel wrongs and to be motivated to act.<sup>58</sup> The recognition theory itself will be the topic of the next chapter.

## 2.4. HONNETH ON FOUCAULT

Honneth appreciates Foucault’s contribution to the development or “learning process” of Critical Theory and of a philosophical anthropology, both of which he discusses extensively in CoP and in SAHN,<sup>59</sup> respectively. In particular, Foucault’s conception of the social as a field of conflict, and some of the action-theoretic aspects of his theory of power influence Honneth’s own thinking. Similar to his criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer, Honneth reads Foucault’s theory as containing critical potentials on which Foucault himself

fails to follow up. These critical potentials will be developed further by Honneth in his Critical Theory.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.4.1. Foucault and Frankfurt School

Some of the core concerns of Foucault recall those of Horkheimer and Adorno. Foucault's Critical Theory of knowledge is motivated by a suspicion towards claims of objectivity and universality, both in scientific theories and in moral theories and philosophical history. The attempt at an "ethnological study" of one's own society, the idea of distancing oneself from and hence questioning one's own social situation echoes the ambition of formulating a critical social theory based on suspicion of socially accepted norms and narratives, as in Horkheimer and Adorno.

Controversially, as we shall see, Honneth distinguishes between three stages in Foucault's writing. In CoP he identifies a first, structuralist, stage concerned with a theory of knowledge. The theory of knowledge that Foucault presents in *Archaeology of Knowledge* links discourses, "culturally valid knowledge systems",<sup>61</sup> to interests and domination, and thus to power, in a way reminiscent of Horkheimer.<sup>62</sup> The link between knowledge and interests and domination motivates a shift from a theory of knowledge to a theory of power.<sup>63</sup> Honneth distinguishes between the second stage, which is an action-theoretic view of power or a struggle-theoretic view of the social, and a third stage, a "totalising" theory of power. The second stage presents an advance over Adorno by introducing an action-theoretic account of the social—as a field of conflict. The "struggle-theoretic" intuition Foucault develops here also informs Honneth's own Critical Theory.

Foucault opposes his account of power to juridical and statist and Marxist accounts. Juridical accounts understand power in terms of rights that individuals possess. These powers can be exercised or alienated, for example, through legal contracts. Statist and Marxist accounts view power as a vertical relation in which the sovereign or the state or capitalist exercises "repressive power".<sup>64</sup> In contrast, Foucault conceives of power as productive, rather than repressive, and as operating always in the context of freedom and thus horizontally. Power is not an external property; rather, it is relational, the outcome of strategic encounters between individuals with conflicting aims. These outcomes are always fragile. Because power only occurs in the context of freedom, power relations are constantly challenged, changing, contingent. This account differs from Adorno's account of power as domination, exercised by repressive systems, including the state and the culture industry.<sup>65</sup> Foucault not only provides a conception that allows for social action but also offers a view of conflict between agents as the driving force of history, thus replacing the functionalist views that cause so much trouble to Horkheimer. In Foucault, history is to be understood as a perpetual struggle, exercises of

power and their challenge. Subjects try to influence each other's behaviour.<sup>66</sup> History is perceived as contingent, fragile outcomes of struggles.<sup>67</sup> This view contradicts Kantian and Hegelian conceptions of history as a "moral learning process" and supports Foucault's suspicions towards enlightenment morality discourse. Ultimately, Honneth will reject Foucault's interpretation of history as contingent and fragile outcomes of conflict in favour of a Hegelian approach. This rejection follows a series of arguments. Honneth argues that Foucault's theory meets internal problems when trying to explain social institutions. Because Foucault's view of the social as perpetual field of struggle leaves no room for non-strategic action and thus for genuinely normatively motivated consensus, he runs into difficulties when trying to explain social institutions.<sup>68</sup> Social institutions require a stability of power relations that is not warranted by the Foucaultian picture. For Honneth, it is the inability to explain social stability in his action-theoretical framework that drives Foucault to a system-theoretic view of the social. In the absence of non-strategic consensus or normatively grounded institutions, stability has to be explained in terms of the ability of an unstable "order of power" to become more efficient at preserving the specific order. This kind of efficiency is achieved through techniques of power, especially through controlling norms, body and knowledge. In other words, a social order preserves current power relations by managing to fix "norms of conduct" or by "routinizing the modes of behaviour through discipline".<sup>69</sup> Often this discipline is exerted on the body. Control over bodily aspects, from motor-movements to health and reproduction, is achieved partly through expansion and use of knowledge, through observation and examination.<sup>70</sup>

Foucault's genealogy of techniques of domination covers the prison system<sup>71</sup> and health systems. He also sees other institutions, such as schools and gyms, as essentially involved in producing normalised subjects. Foucault's investigation relies on the idea of power as productive rather than repressive. It also leads him now to embrace a view of history as "accumulation of violence or domination",<sup>72</sup> a view of history as "totalizing power".<sup>73</sup> In the end this, later, view of history is similar to Adorno's theory of total domination. Honneth locates the reason for turning to this totalising view in Foucault's rejection of normativity. For Honneth, it must be possible to normatively ground social struggles so that they can come to a halt once a free consensus is found. This consensus, rather than total domination, allows for social stability and the norms to which members consent to be manifested in the institutions of society. If some struggles are motivated normatively, that also means emancipatory action is possible. Moreover, history can be seen as a "moral learning process". The consequences of this critique of Foucault for Honneth's own theory are clear: Honneth appropriates the struggle-theoretic view of the social and a view of struggle as engine of history, but he allows room for emancipatory social action.

Overall, then, Honneth argues that Foucault formulates important action-theoretic insights that go beyond the insights of Habermas in some sense but then fail to follow through; instead, Foucault pursues a theory that ultimately undermines these insights and moves his critique closer to Adorno's totalising critique. Unsurprisingly, Honneth, in the end, draws parallels between Foucault's analysis of totalitarian power and the social critique in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Honneth's reading of Foucault is not uncontroversial, and Danielle Petherbridge argues that Honneth's particular interpretation leads to problems in his own theory. Specifically, Petherbridge thinks that Honneth mistakenly reads Foucault's theory of power as consisting of distinct stages. Instead, Petherbridge suggests, Foucault's theory should be seen as a complex theory of power with conflicting aspects. On the one hand, there is the conception of the social as a field of struggle between individuals who try to influence each other's behaviour,<sup>74</sup> while at the same time power is involved in producing subjects and subjectivities through institutions. Honneth downplays this productive aspect of power. The pervasiveness of power relations that Foucault describes also has implications for the possibility of emancipatory action and causes problems for the idea of "normatively grounded consensus" if by that we mean anything other than strategic consensus which is "strategically disguised" as normative or moral. We will revisit this objection in the last chapter once we have a fuller understanding of Honneth's recognition theory. In this context, we will also be discussing objections by Lois McNay and Judith Butler, who raise concerns about Honneth's recognition theory that can be traced back to an insufficient appreciation of the complexity of the notion of power in Foucault, which, in turn, may be due to interpretational peculiarities Petherbridge identifies.<sup>75</sup>

## 2.5. METHODS OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Honneth distinguishes between different types of social criticism also in terms of the different methods they employ. First of all, all types of social criticism in the Critical Theory tradition are normative and thus rely on an evaluative framework. We can distinguish between immanent critique and transcending critique with reference to this evaluative framework. Immanent critique refers back to, and thus relies on, values of the society whose practices or structures are criticised. The kinds of social wrongs that qualify as "injustice" are often explained in these terms. Immanent critique has a long history in left-Hegelian tradition, but Honneth holds that for some purposes immanent critique, as he understands it, is not sufficient.<sup>76</sup> Given that Honneth holds that social pathologies are part of the social wrongs that Critical Theory aims to expose, and given also that our particular value

frameworks might be co-constitutive of such pathologies, we need to have transcending or external norms that we can refer to. More concretely, Honneth holds that social pathology is concerned with healthy living, living well or “social perfection”,<sup>77</sup> which always goes beyond or reaches deeper than the principles of justice we appeal to in cases of injustice.<sup>78</sup> Elsewhere Honneth says, “What constitutes the standard according to which social pathologies are evaluated is an ethical conception of social normality tailored to conditions that enable human self-realization”.<sup>79</sup> For Honneth, the principles are ultimately justified in terms of this “social normality”, which is more basic than principles of justice and also contains ethical rather than highly abstract moral commitments.<sup>80</sup> Criteria about good social life are thus foundational—and as we shall see below, they are culture transcending to some extent. This also means that principles of justice could be pathological or can co-constitute pathogens (depending on their source or effect). When it comes to transcending critique, Honneth identifies three kinds of legitimate social critique: world-disclosing critique, critique that is grounded in a philosophy of history and critique grounded in philosophical anthropology.

### 2.5.1. World-Disclosing Critique

Honneth defends reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a “world-disclosing critique” rather than as a transcendental critique. The “world-disclosing critique” is a solution to a particular methodological dilemma. On the one hand, it seems necessary that social criticism can and does diagnose social wrongs or misdevelopments at the most foundational level—in other words, that social pathologies can be the object of social criticism. However, these social pathologies are understood as pathological according to standards that transcend the context of culturally interpreted and institutionalised values because the process of generating values, the values themselves and the associated institutions might be complicit in frustrating human flourishing and thus might be part of a pathology or might be pathogens. The standards by which we understand social pathologies are not, or not necessarily, imminent but are context transcending. Justifying context-transcending standards runs into particular difficulties. Honneth distinguishes between different types of problems here. He considers Richard Rorty’s objection to transcendental critique on epistemological grounds.<sup>81</sup> Rorty suggests that we can only understand the world in terms of our language and interpretative schemes. A critique that purports to transcend those contexts is either despotic or elitist. Similarly, Honneth considers Michael Walzer’s “moral-philosophical” objections.<sup>82</sup> According to Walzer, context-transcending, universal values gain universal validity only at the cost of abstractness. But the abstractness required to transcend cultural understandings is too removed to be able to account for the “normative force and moral richness” of local normative

frameworks. Again, this critique would be elitist (“rational elitism”), but it also misses important aspects of morality. In addition to these arguments, Honneth also considers issues that are more closely connected with the thick ethical conceptions involved in the idea of a “pathology”. Those thick conceptions must be either grounded in empirical understanding of human nature, which are controversial, or based on commitment to specific values, which is difficult in the context of value pluralism.<sup>83</sup> While Honneth himself opts for a different response, world-disclosing critique is a possible response to a situation in which social criticism of pathologies is needed and standards of “social perfection” are difficult to justify.

The “world-disclosing critique” does not aim to raise validity claims, and thus it circumvents the justificatory issue. Rather, it relies on the mutual interdependence of the perception of reality and the genesis of values. Drawing on Hilary Putnam, Honneth holds that our values co-determine how we perceive the world. How we perceive the world determines or co-determines the formation of values.<sup>84</sup> Critique as world disclosure aims to change values by radically changing our perception of the world. The perceptual shift must be such that new constellations become apparent—for example, we come to associate culture with an industrial domination complex. The shift in perception in the reader and audience is brought about not by rational argument but through rhetorical means, such as “suggestive metaphors”,<sup>85</sup> the use of “chiasmus”—that is, linking terms that are usually not associated with each other (e.g. “culture industry”)<sup>86</sup>—and exaggerations and coined phrases that are short and “snappy” but contain the essence of the critique. The aim is persuasion. Honneth describes the relation to truth as “indirect” because no truth claims are raised (as mentioned above) and it is left to the audience to decide on the appropriateness of the disclosure.

### **2.5.2. Formal Conception of the Good Life, History and Anthropology**

While the world-disclosing function of a critique is important, it is not the only type of social criticisms and, more to the point, it is not the type Honneth himself employs. While “world-disclosing critique” might constitute a valuable form of critique *per se*, in Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s case it is also motivated by their rejection of the emancipatory potential of conceptual thought and social action. In the context of their critique, trying to find consensus through raising validity claims that must be defended through engaging in discourse is not a path to emancipation or liberation, since reasoning and consensus are subject to and complicit in forms of domination. According to Adorno, consensus is reached through conformity enforced by, for example, the culture industry. Since Honneth preserves a space for emancipatory social action, he also preserves the possibility of the unity between

theory and practice in a different way: Theory should explain, justify and guide social action by contributing to agent's self-understanding partly in communicative contexts. His theory must thus raise validity claims which are contestable in discourse. Honneth distinguishes two ways in which standards of "social perfection", or the "formal conception of the good life",<sup>87</sup> can be justified. There is the left-Hegelian tradition that grounds standards historically, and there is a rival tradition which grounds standards in philosophical anthropology.

The historical justification judges social practices from the standpoint of a future, liberated society. We can find precursors to this in Kant; however, it is a method that is usually associated with Hegel and left-Hegelian Marxists like György Lukács.<sup>88</sup> But the philosophical-historical commitments involved in this justification are problematic. The least problematic aspect is an apparent commitment to a view of history as progressive, which will be discussed in chapters 6 and 8. The most strikingly problematic aspect is the construction of the perspective of the liberated future society from the oppressed present society. For one, it seems that in order to construct the perspective, the critic must already have formulated a formal concept of ethical life, which is supposedly justified by that future perspective. So that which is to be justified is involved in creating the standard of justification.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, apart from the circularity, it is not clear that from the context of oppression—and possibly internalised oppressive structures—we are able to conceive of a correct conception.

It should be said that while the metaphysical commitments involved in this form of historical justification cause Honneth to be suspicious of grounding social criticism in a projected future of the human species, history does play an important role in his theory. On the one hand, a critical social theory must be self-reflexive also in a historical sense. It must be constituted so as to be in a position to diagnose the ills of its time. Not all critical concepts are appropriate for all contexts. Moreover, what constitutes the "core disciplines" of the interdisciplinary aspect might change over time. One of Honneth's recurring criticisms of Adorno is that a method and conceptual framework that is appropriate to understand totalitarianism, especially Nazism and Stalinism, is then employed to understand the post-totalitarian, liberal societies of the "West" in the 1960s.<sup>90</sup>

As we will see in much more detail in the next chapter, the early Honneth himself opts to ground his social philosophy in a philosophical anthropology, which he develops out of the critical reconstruction of the philosophical anthropologies of, for example, Feuerbach, early Marx and anthropological Marxists (especially the Budapest School), Arnold Gehlen and, of course, Habermas and Mead. He combines this theoretical analysis with psychological and psychoanalytic theories and classical sociologists. His aim is to come up with a philosophical anthropology of self-formation. This will allow him

to identify species-specific features or needs that must be met in order for self-realisation to be possible. Taking his cues from Feuerbach and early Marx, those features are based on human embodiment as well as the intersubjective nature of self-formation. Both embodiment and the intersubjective nature of self-formation give rise to specific needs and vulnerabilities which social structures must respond to.<sup>91</sup>

### 2.5.3. Interdisciplinarity

Honneth embraces the interdisciplinary project that Horkheimer outlines. Especially when it comes to the formulation of his anthropology, Honneth draws extensively on empirical research in psychology and on psychoanalytic theories. Honneth also relies on sociological theories and studies, particularly in his accounts of some of the social pathologies and class consciousness. He also draws on history to justify some normative aspects of his theory. The relation between the different disciplines is dialectical in the way envisaged by Horkheimer. Philosophy has to respond to empirical data but also order the data and provide conceptual and normative clarity.<sup>92</sup> Again, one of the perceived weaknesses of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is its distance from any empirical data or research. As we have seen, Adorno and Horkheimer must reject the social sciences as complicit in domination, hence abandoning the interdisciplinary project is internally coherent. However, it means that the plausibility of the theory as a whole suffers unless read as a world-disclosing critique. The dialectical relationship between different (core) disciplines not only enhances plausibility but also tightens the link between theory and practice by tightening the relation between the sphere of social experience and practice and theory.

### 2.5.4. Reconstructive Critique

Partly as a reaction to Walzer, Honneth draws out the “ideal” of the first-generation critical method of a “reconstructive critique”.<sup>93</sup> Walzer distinguishes between three types of social criticism, which are marked by the way in which they justify the normative standpoint of critique: “revelation”, “invention” and “interpretation”. Theories that justify their normative standpoint through “revelation” hold that the normative validity of their standpoint is intuitively or religiously grasped. Honneth interprets theories that rely on “invention” as “constructive theories”, which appeal to “principles capable of general agreement”,<sup>94</sup> themselves justified in real or fictive conditions. The prime example for this type of theory is John Rawls, who, under the fictive “veil of ignorance”, justifies a set of principles and procedures which can be used to criticise a given social order.<sup>95</sup> Theories that rely on “interpretation” are reconceived by Honneth as “reconstructive social criticism”. They

present a form of immanent critique.<sup>96</sup> Reconstructive criticism criticises a given social order with reference to normative ideals, principles or norms that are anchored in that social reality. They are the norms and ideals that might underlie some institutions, and social criticism might point out failures to realise norms. It is the kind of critique Marx offers of capitalism, which is based on normative ideals that it—in reality—violates.<sup>97</sup> As seen above, reconstructive criticism, however, cannot simply criticise a social order with reference to the value horizon present in that society; it also has to show that those values are normatively valid. For the first generation of the Frankfurt School, following Hegel and Marx, the ideals were normatively valid if they presented an embodiment of the highest available form of social reason. The idea of normative ideals as realisation of reason is linked to a particular view of history as a moral learning process which is connected to social action.<sup>98</sup> For example, social conflicts or struggles over the application or interpretation of rights at any given time contribute to a higher-developed social reason. We learn either to apply principles better or to refine principles. Overall, then, on the reconstructive view, we are justified in criticising a social order with reference to those immanent values and ideals that embody the highest form of social reason or the most appropriate interpretation and application of the most advanced principles available to us.

However, appeal to immanent norms and justification of those norms in terms of reason is not sufficient. The experience of National Socialism, especially, has shown that moral norms and principles are open to abuse and their meanings can change.<sup>99</sup> In order to ensure that the principles appealed to still have the valid normative meaning, a genealogical investigation must also be added. The outcome is a reconstructive criticism which appeals to values that are present in the social reality of the given society and which can be justified with reference to a “context-transcending concept of rationality”, anchored in a particular view of moral progress, and which have been shown to have maintained the normatively valid meaning. A form of reconstructive criticism also underlies Honneth’s more recent works, where the anthropological approach takes a back seat, without disappearing, however.<sup>100</sup> In response to Walzer’s conception of social criticism, Honneth formulates the reconstructive critique with a genealogical proviso. Drawing on Horkheimer’s programmatic essay, Honneth emphasises the self-reflective aspect of Critical Theory. Critical Theory aims to find the normative basis in social reality—that is, it draws on those values that are socially embodied (in form of institutions or customs) and which are also an expression of the most developed form of rationality available at the time. In other words, social critique might draw on the actual values of its own society, but only if the normative validity of these values can be justified. The validity can be justified if those values express or embody a “rational achievement of human beings”.<sup>101</sup> Underlying this approach, then, is a view of history as progressive realisation

of reason and a view of reason as context-transcending.<sup>102</sup> Alternatively, values can be justified with reference to philosophical anthropology (e.g. with reference to universal human cognitive needs) or a combination of both.

## 2.6. SUMMARY

Overall, then, Honneth conceives of social philosophy in terms of a Critical Theory of society. The task of this theory is to assist emancipation. It does so by diagnosis of social wrongs, injustice, social misdevelopments and social pathologies. To some extent, this diagnosis itself might motivate social action and change—for example, through a world-disclosing critique. In other cases, the relation between theory and practice is conceived of as a relation between social movements and theory which explains, justifies and guides these movements. Social philosophy conceived in that way also has a normative dimension. This normative dimension operates with a thicker conception of the good than mainstream analytic political and/or moral theories (which operated with thin conceptions of the right). These thicker conceptions, which are still formal conceptions of the ethical life, are to be justified with and grounded in human needs for self-realisation, which in turn are grounded in empirically informed philosophical anthropology.<sup>103</sup> Honneth insists on the notion of the “intramundane transcendent”—that is, on finding the source of normativity in social experiences which possess “normative surplus”. These experiences point beyond themselves to how the social world ought to be. The normative expectations that ground the experience are in turn explicable in terms of anthropology and self-realisation.

As we will see in the next chapter, Honneth locates the normative force in our experience of disrespect or humiliation, and his social philosophy is consequently a theory of recognition. Chapter 3 will introduce this theory, while chapters 4 and 5 will show how that theory fares as a standard for diagnosis of injustice and social pathology.

## NOTES

1. Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”, 4.
2. Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”.
3. Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”.
4. Honneth is aware of noteworthy exceptions—for example, Michael Walzer and David Miller. Miller specifically is concerned about Rawlsian neglect of empirical data, and in his theory of social justice, he tries to incorporate quantitative research. While Honneth finds similarities between his theory and that of Miller, methodologically, the relation to empirical data is underdeveloped in Honneth’s eyes. Specifically, Miller neglects the importance of history to justify theoretical distinction. See Honneth, “Philosophy as Social Research” and “Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso”.
5. See also Honneth, “Philosophy as Social Research”, 119.

6. Neuhaus, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Philosophy*.
7. See, for example, Anderson, "Situating Axel Honneth in the Frankfurt School Tradition", esp. 45–46.
8. However, Honneth is keen to emphasise that Critical Theory should not regard social movements as normative sources (see Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*).
9. Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect".
10. Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 64.
11. Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 63.
12. Honneth, *Critique of Power* (CoP), 14.
13. CoP, 16.
14. CoP, 16.
15. CoP, 24.
16. See Horkheimer, TKT; Honneth, CoP, 25.
17. CoP, 26.
18. CoP, 26.
19. CoP, 15–16.
20. CoP, 19, "social labour . . . socio-cultural progress".
21. CoP, 13–31.
22. CoP, 20.
23. CoP, 32–33.
24. For Adorno, especially, the thesis of the loss of personality is a thesis that fits well into his commitment to "retrogressive anthropogenesis" (CoP, 37), which holds that history is nothing more than the regression of human society to a state of pre-civilization. The replacement of "bourgeois autonomy" with subjectless subjects is just one important step in that history.
25. CoP, 33; see also DE. The adoption of Friedrich Pollock's notion of "state capitalism", which was developed to explain the economic structure of National Socialism, is highly controversial. Even at its conception, the theory did not fit the empirical data (see Postone, "Critique, State, and Economy").
26. CoP, 76.
27. CoP, 79–81.
28. CoP, 36; see also Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening", in *The Culture Industry*.
29. CoP, 85. Due to considerations of space, I have to forgo Honneth's insightful critique of internal contradictions and erroneous psychoanalytic assumptions in Adorno's appropriation of psychoanalysis, in which Honneth draws on Jessica Benjamin (CoP, 83–94).
30. CoP, 49–53.
31. CoP, 49.
32. CoP, 49–50.
33. See Horkheimer and Adorno, "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment", in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 35–62.
34. See, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 35–38.
35. The only possibility of emancipation in Adorno is to turn to non-conceptual, non-instrumental thought to mimesis and the production and experience of art.
36. I can only focus on those criticisms that are also direct indications/precursors of Honneth's own theory; it is impossible to do justice to all of Honneth's treatments of Habermas.
37. CoP, 298–99.
38. See, for example, CoP, esp. 212–13.
39. It is important to point out that Honneth is not the only one who is worried about these aspects of Habermas's theory. Feminists tend to worry about the "myth" of undistorted communication.
40. CoP, 299.
41. CoP, 301. Honneth will eventually be suspected of similar idealisation of the socialisation process; see discussions in chapters 4 and 7.
42. CoP, 301. We will see that increasingly Honneth himself ignores some of these insights.

43. See Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*; see also Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*; Deranty, *Beyond Communication*; Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*; CoP.

44. See, for example, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", in *Disrespect*, 75–77.

45. For example, Honneth criticises unpaid housework and generally interprets some of the feminist arguments in terms of labour as a source of esteem ("The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 76; Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*?).

46. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*.

47. See, for example, Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance".

48. In Honneth, *Disrespect*, 80–96.

49. Honneth, "Moral Consciousness", 84–86.

50. Honneth, "Moral Consciousness", 88–90.

51. CoP, 281; see also Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 69.

52. CoP, 281.

53. Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 70.

54. See also Honneth, "From Adorno to Habermas", 114–20.

55. Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 70.

56. Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 70.

57. "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect", 69; see also CoP.

58. The experiences of violations of recognition relations, or misrecognition, can explain what is wrong with violations of the ideal speech situation as well. The latter are really a form of misrecognition.

59. Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*.

60. See also Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, who identifies this as Honneth's strategy.

61. CoP, 150.

62. CoP, 144, 151.

63. CoP, 153.

64. CoP, 154.

65. CoP, 159.

66. See also Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 76.

67. CoP, 153–54.

68. CoP, 161–62.

69. CoP, 166.

70. CoP, 166–70.

71. Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*.

72. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 38.

73. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 38.

74. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*.

75. See, for example, McNay, *Against Recognition*; Butler, "Taking Another's View: Ambivalent Implications".

76. See, for example, Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society", esp. 51–56.

77. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society", 56.

78. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society", 56.

79. Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social", 36.

80. As we will see below, this poses a specific problem for context-transcending criteria, as they tend to be more abstract than the particular cultural understandings and conventions institutionalised in particular laws or customs which immanent critique might appeal to.

81. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique", 52.

82. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique", 53.

83. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique", 56.

84. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique", 57.

85. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique", 57, 59.

86. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique", 59–60.

87. Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social", 36.

88. Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social", 23–26.

89. Of course, as an alternative, we might recall that Marcuse proposes a way to formulate a negative utopia, an image of what society will not look like, coupled with glimmers of possibilities (formed with reference to real potentialities and bounded-phantasy), see chapter 1.

90. Horkheimer and Adorno are aware of this issue. In the preface to the 1969 edition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, they justify not modifying their theory because they think that while some parts of their analysis no longer fit, other parts are still contemporary—so the issue might be less about methodology here but about whether liberal societies are appropriately still understood as having regressive tendencies.

91. See Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*; see also Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”, esp. 22–24.

92. Honneth, “Philosophy as Social Research”, 119–34.

93. Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism”, 46.

94. Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism”, 47.

95. Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism”, 46–47.

96. Walzer himself argues for social criticism based on interpretation.

97. Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism”, 47.

98. Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism”, 50.

99. In chapter 5 we will see that changing the meaning of originally emancipatory language (e.g. the language of autonomy) to signify repressive practices or structures (e.g. deregulation of the labour market) is a particular mechanism of maintaining oppressive structures.

100. This is a method he outlines already in “Reconstructive Social Criticism”. See also *Freedom’s Right (Das Recht der Freiheit)*, where Honneth in many ways updates Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Here, Honneth combines a normative reconstruction which focuses not on the evolution of socially shared values but on those values that are key to social reproduction. This normative reconstruction, which involves a commitment to moral progress, is to ground the idea of a particular, historically developed, conception of “social freedom” as normative superior value. Social pathologies, misdevelopment and injustice can be understood in terms of violations of social freedom. This method will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

101. Honneth, “Reconstructive Criticism”, 50.

102. Honneth, “Reconstructive Criticism”, 50–51.

103. They are formal, because, as Honneth emphasises at various points, they are not concerned with the particular projects individuals ought to have but only with “the social conditions of human self-realization” (Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”, 36).

## *Chapter Three*

# Honneth's Recognition Theory

Given Honneth's commitment to the emancipatory project and the idea of Critical Theory as descriptive, practical and normative, his theory must be able to describe especially those social practices, institutions and mechanisms that prevent emancipation. The theory must also have a normative dimension, from which we can evaluate social, political and economic practices, as well as institutions and policies, and which point to the direction of (necessary) changes. Lastly, the theory must "be practical". It can be practical in various ways: it might be action guiding, or it might be motivating (for example, through bringing about cognitive transformations). It might also help to make intelligible the (underlying) normative claims of social movements and show in what sense these claims are legitimate.

For Honneth, the descriptive, practical and normative dimensions come together in the experience of misrecognition. An explication of this experience helps to understand and describe the nature of those mechanisms that prevent human emancipation. The experience itself can only be understood with reference to normative expectations and so provides access to deep-seated, pre-theoretical, moral expectations and requirements. It contains a normative dimension that is based in everyday experience and the pre-theoretical understanding of an individual's own experience of injury. The normative dimension of the theory is grounded in concrete social experiences rather than abstractly formulated moral principles or principles that are derived a priori and then applied to the world. Recognition theory also involves abstraction, but the norms are explicitly grounded in and referring to the concrete experience. The practical relevance of recognition theory follows from its rootedness in everyday life. It can serve emancipatory practice in all the three ways outlined above.

In order to move from experiences of misrecognition to a critical social theory based on recognition, Honneth draws on various sources. Much of the theoretical framework is taken from a critical reconstruction of Hegel's writings of the early Jena period, which are later complemented by specific readings of later Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (see chapter 6).<sup>1</sup> In order to provide a plausible empirical basis to complement the Hegelian framework, Honneth draws on G. H. Mead and on Donald Winnicott's psychological theories. Honneth's theory is also supported by studies in social history (for example, the development of legal rights).

This chapter and the next will provide a detailed outline of recognition theory. The first section of the chapter will introduce Honneth's Hegelian theoretical recognition framework before moving on to the empirical support that Honneth finds in psychological theories in the second section. The third section will briefly outline Honneth's theory as a social theory—though the different aspects of recognition as critical social theory, which offers an account of justice and of social pathology, are explored in depth in the next two chapters.

### 3.1. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are three key ideas Honneth adopts from Hegel and develops in his own recognition theory: the relationship between recognition, conflict and progress; the idea of different spheres and types of recognition; and, lastly, the role recognition plays in self-formation and self-realisation. I will discuss each of them in turn.

#### 3.1.1. Recognition, Conflict and Progress

One way of understanding Hegel's insight into the nature of conflict is to contrast it with dominant, Hobbesian views. Hobbesians understand social conflict in terms of individual self-interest. When the interests of agents clash, conflicts ensue; they are conflicts of interest. Struggles are often carried out by groups who aim to further their position. These groups only come into existence because it is in the rational self-interest of individuals to come together and combine their powers for as long as and to the degree that interests coincide or partially overlap. Underlying this view is a form of individualism. The starting point of the social theory is self-interested, rational individuals who act only to further their private interests. Groups come into existence because individuals choose to cooperate when it serves their interest. While social struggles might employ moral vocabulary, they are ultimately not normative struggles but struggles over influence. On this view, struggles are not connected to moral progress in any substantial sense.

Hegel opposes the individualism of the social contract traditions of Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes and also the slightly different individualism of Kant. In Kant, there is a strong normative dimension. However, the starting point of all these theories is the independent, rational individual who already possesses autonomy. Instead, Hegel proposes a view of the self as essentially socially embedded. The self, interests and autonomy are formed only in and through relation with others. Groups do not come into existence because we self-interestedly and rationally consent to cooperate. We are born into communities. For Hegel, we require particular types of relationships to become autonomous individuals—that is, relations of recognition. Below I will examine these relations in more detail. Here, I want to focus on the role these relations play for an account of conflict. Conflict, for Hegel, is essentially a conflict about recognition, and because recognition is morally owed, it is a normative conflict. It is the demand that I be recognised as a subject or—later—as that particular subject with particular needs and capabilities, that drives my struggle. Struggles are normative in two senses, which Honneth works out in much more detail. First, they are normative because they are about claims about what is morally owed; insofar as recognition is a source of self-conscious agency, it is also the appropriate attitude towards free agents (respect) and a condition of freedom. In other words, there is no moral agency without recognition, nor can there be freedom (proper). Second, insofar as these claims are legitimate and the struggle for recognition results in more recognition, these struggles bring about moral progress. Struggles for recognition are what pushes societies to expand the scope of those individuals who are recognised (inclusivity) and the scope of the attributes about persons that are recognised (individualisation). The struggle for the vote is a struggle about a form of recognition that is morally owed, and once it has succeeded, society has achieved moral progress because more people now receive the recognition they are due.<sup>2</sup>

### **3.1.2. Different Types of Recognition**

Honneth ultimately distinguishes four types of recognition: “Antecedent Recognition”, recognition as love, recognition as respect and recognition as esteem.<sup>3</sup> Antecedent recognition refers to the most basic form of recognition, which—according to Honneth—precedes any other form of recognition and much of our cognition. It is a primary relation of fundamental affective reaction to another subject, where this reaction might be one of care or of intense dislike. The valence of the emotional reaction is not the distinguishing factor. Antecedent recognition is an affective reaction that is a manifestation of our acknowledgment of the other as a subject with emotions, desires and orientation in the world (including projects). Antecedent recognition differs from positive affirmation; it is important for the diagnosis of some

types of pathology and will be discussed in chapter 5. Recognition as positive affirmation with normative potency is the focus of this chapter.

Honneth distinguishes three types of normative recognition which motivate social struggles and which also play a role in the diagnosis and cure of social pathology and injustice. He finds some underdeveloped precursors of the different types of recognition in Hegel, who early on distinguishes between relations of recognition in the family (love) and legal recognition (respect). Hegel also understands that there is a demand for a third type of recognition that holds between members of a state, which Honneth expands and develops into his notion of “esteem”.

Love is the recognition individuals receive qua being concrete individuals with needs and desires. It aims at concrete particularity.<sup>4</sup> For the early Hegel, it is part of “natural ethical life” and describes recognition in relationships between parents and children (“System of Ethical Life”) as well as in sexual relations between partners (or, more precisely in Hegel, in marriage), in the later “Realphilosophie”.<sup>5</sup> Loving care for the emotional and physical needs for children aims ultimately at raising children into independent individuals (and so at breaking “the union”).<sup>6</sup> In sexual love, partners recognise themselves as subjects in the desire of the other. Sexual relations can develop into love if or when the “reciprocal experience of knowing-oneself-in-the-other . . . can become intersubjectively shared knowledge on the part of both”.<sup>7</sup> Once this knowledge is shared, partners can trust that each is truly concerned about the subjectivity—and hence the needs—of the other; they are now recognised as particular subjects. Relations of love allow individuals to experience themselves and each other as individuals with particular needs and desires.<sup>8</sup> This experience of oneself as a “needy, desiring subject” is necessary to allow the development of legal personhood. The sphere of the family, by partaking in the institution of property and by fostering an awareness and articulation of interests and needs, clears the path for participation in the legal sphere and awareness of oneself as a legal person. Love describes an emotional relation to others that achieves social integration of concrete individuals through acknowledgement of and care for emotional and physical needs and desires. In love, cognition, affection and action are “hard to separate”. Needs are “[naturally satisfied] in the form of reciprocal love”, and through the mutual awareness of the contribution the other makes to myself, trust and union develop, such that that separation would lead to feelings of “incompleteness”.<sup>9</sup> Within ethical life, the family thus teaches children not just to recognise themselves as unique individuals but also to affectively appreciate the unique subjectivity of others and to develop a trust that being-with-others is not a threat to selfhood but constitutes its realisation. This is fundamental preparation for participation in the ethical life that is provided in the sphere of love.<sup>10</sup> As Honneth points out, the number of people loved in

this way by any particular individual is limited. Love as deep affection cannot be expanded at will or to too many individuals.<sup>11</sup>

Honneth's position on love differs from that of Hegel. As we can see in chapter 8, following Danielle Petherbridge's argument, Honneth can be said to idealise and normatively "purify" Hegel's account of love. I should also note that Honneth's account changes in important aspects in the works after *The Struggle for Recognition* (SfR). Honneth's mature account of the sphere of love will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4. This chapter will only focus on the basic aspects that motivate his theory. I will indicate where his views have developed over time. Love is understood as an affective relationship between concrete individuals who acknowledge and care for each other's needs and desires. In contrast to Hegel though, Honneth insists on also viewing friendship, alongside sexual and romantic relationships and relationships between primary caregivers and children, as a love relationship. In friendship too, individuals are bound by deep affection and care for each other's needs and desires. Friendship is a relationship that is characterised by stable interactions of care and concern and trust.<sup>12</sup> Honneth regards the modern idea of friendship as a relationship that is available to all individuals, rather than a small elite, as a relatively new phenomenon. In SfR, Honneth thinks that of all the recognition spheres, the sphere of love is a sphere in which the principle of recognition cannot develop further. Our understanding of love does not change throughout history, and so there is no learning process—through recognition struggles—when it comes to recognition in this sphere. Honneth soon changes his view. In more recent writings he traces historical developments of various aspects of the sphere of love and shows that the family and sexual partnerships are locations of struggles for recognition. In particular, measures of responding to vulnerability in love relations, where individuals open up and affirm deep emotional dependencies, have developed. These vulnerabilities are heightened by the fact that the affective constituent of love relations is fragile and not under the control of the will.<sup>13</sup> Honneth claims that the nature of love relationships has developed over time, partly because the types of needs that we are aware of and (need) care for have increased and diversified. The institutional sphere of family and of partnerships, which now includes more than just one type of relationship, has become more complex, with all three recognition principles operating in these spheres now. Overall, then, we can speak of progress also in this sphere of recognition.

Respect, or legal recognition, aims at the universal dimension of identity. It is here that individuals become "persons" with (abstract) rights that guarantee negative freedom. For Hegel, this sphere is linked to property rights and ownership. We learn to understand ourselves in general, universal, terms through principles of capitalist exchange. In the practice of exchange, we have to conceive of our particular needs and desires in ways that are under-

standable to others. We also learn to integrate and coordinate our needs and projects with others.<sup>14</sup> The principle of respect for universal human dignity, which is the principle of recognition in that sphere, has been the engine of various recognitive struggles. Struggles for expansion of respect include struggles to extend rights to previously marginalised groups.

Esteem is the form of recognition that is most underdeveloped in Hegel. It is a form of recognition that holds between members of a community and extends beyond the scope of love. It has affective and cognitive dimensions. In Hegel, esteem is realised mostly in the sphere of the state, among citizens; in Honneth, esteem is a form of recognition realised mostly in the economic sphere. For Honneth, esteem is granted on the basis of the particular skills and achievements of a person insofar as they contribute to the realisation of shared social projects and values. In his response to questions raised by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, Honneth clarifies the connection between recognition and value. Recognition is a reaction to perceiving something objectively valuable in the other. Honneth here commits to a moderate-value realism. The values which we recognise in others or which we recognise others for are objective, but socially determined, and hence they change and develop throughout history. Further, we can distinguish between three types of “evaluative qualities” along dimensions that relate to a person’s particularity, dignity and special skills, to which we respond with love, respect and esteem.<sup>15</sup>

The three different types of recognition roughly correspond to three different spheres of social life, which Honneth also adopts from Hegel. However, the recognition principles do not map neatly onto institutional spheres. Hegel’s distinction between three different spheres—family, civil society and the state—become sphere of love, a legal sphere and a social sphere in Honneth. The personal sphere is mostly governed by love as the expression of recognition. The legal sphere corresponds to respect and the social sphere to esteem (or solidarity) as expression of recognition. However, the interaction between spheres is complex. In the spirit of Honneth’s “negativist procedure”,<sup>16</sup> we can understand interactions better with reference to misrecognition. Misrecognition in the sphere of love, which affects my self-conception as a unique and needy individual, and my fundamental trust in myself and others can impact on the way in which I can interact with others in the sphere of respect and esteem. Institutionally, the sphere of love seems to coincide with institutions such as family, marriage, partnerships and friendships. However, some of these institutions are also governed by more than one recognition principle—for example, love and legal respect operate in the family. Honneth describes the intertwining of love and respect in the family in “Between Justice and Affection”, and the intertwining of esteem and respect in the market sphere is one of the key issues between him and Nancy

Fraser in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, which we will discuss in the next chapter.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.1.3. Recognition and Self-Formation

In Hegel, recognition is essential for our ability to become aware of ourselves as subjects and persons. Honneth holds that misrecognition in each of the spheres damages our practical self-relation and hence our moral agency. Corresponding to three types of recognition, Honneth identifies three types of practical self-relation: self-confidence (love), self-respect (respect) and self-worth (esteem). All three are necessary for us to become autonomous subjects. In order to substantiate the link between recognition and self-formation, Honneth turns to empirical theories. Especially the psychoanalytic approach of Winnicott and the psychological theory of Mead help us to better understand the precise nature of the contributions of love, respect and esteem to the self, understood both as moral agent and as unique personality.

## 3.2. PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF RECOGNITION

Mead and Winnicott offer different reasons for, and accounts of, the relevance of recognition, but Honneth manages to combine both theories into an internally coherent theory of self-formation and maintenance.

### 3.2.1. Mead and the Dialectic between I and Me

Honneth draws on Mead to provide an empirical basis for the role of recognition in identity formation. I will not be able to do justice to the complexity of Honneth's treatment of Mead and thus will focus only on the main points here.<sup>18</sup> Honneth draws on Mead's distinction between "me" and "I". Roughly, "me" describes those aspects or moments of the self that I am aware of, that are the object of my consciousness, whereas "I" describes those elusive aspects of the self that cannot be objects of consciousness. "I" refers to ongoing subjective thought or creative activity that cannot be fully grasped in consciousness.<sup>19</sup> The "me" can only come into existence through relations of recognition. It is only through seeing me as an object from the perspective of my partners in interaction that I can become aware of myself.

In so adopting a "second-order" perspective on myself, I come to cognitively understand myself as an agent whose actions elicit responses in others (which I generate in myself as I adopt the perspective of others) and whose actions thus have social meaning. The reactions of my partners of interaction, through which I perceive myself as object of consciousness and through which I thus construct a conception of myself, also express normative expectations. The conception of myself, the "me", has a normative dimension.<sup>20</sup>

The “me” involves both a “generalised me” and a “generalised other”; I generalise who I am through the widening of my frame of interaction (e.g. each interaction shows that “I am the child who always disappoints expectation x”). At the same time, I engage in generalising the other until I arrive at a conception of social rules and values generally.<sup>21</sup> The interaction with others and the normative expectations (also as rules and values) are ongoing and internalised.

The “me” stands in a dialectical relation to the “I”. The “I” is variously described as an “unconscious force”, “a collection site for all the inner impulses expressed in involuntary reactions”;<sup>22</sup> it is the source of creativity, “the spontaneous reaction formation”. It is a disruptive response of unconscious moments of the individual to the social environment and its normative demands and expectations. The “I” as locus of spontaneous activity cannot be grasped as a (static) object and can only be discovered through its effects on and in behaviour. The ongoing conflict between the “me”, as the internalised social demands, and the “I”, as subjective activity, is at the core of social and individual development. In terms of moral social development, the “I” is the source of struggles for recognition that drive progress. The “I” as being restrained by norms (including the institutionalisation of norms—for example, in law) puts pressure on the “me” to achieve accommodation of the “I”. This accommodation requires the “me” to engage in struggles for recognition—either in terms of struggles for the expansion of the scope and diversity of legal rights or in terms of struggles for the evaluative affirmation of unique traits.<sup>23</sup> These struggles for recognition are complex, and one could say they happen on two levels, the individual level and the social level.

First, there is a struggle for the “I” to be recognised by the “me”. Honneth describes this mechanism as disruptive force. In order to accommodate it, the individual has to be prepared to engage in a process of self-discovery and self-disclosure. As we will see below, this process is itself dependent on the individual’s (ongoing) experience of and participation in specific kinds of relations of mutual recognition with other subjects, as it requires the individual to possess self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem enough to actually take these demands of the “I” to be worthy of discovery, articulation and integration. Once aspects of the “I” have been disclosed, they need to be reflectively reconciled with the “me”.

This reconciliation or integration also involves an expansion of the “me” or an “idealised me”.<sup>24</sup> Because the “me” is partly constituted by the (internalised) expectations and approvals of generalised others, it is necessary that this “me” can justify the realisation of impulses and creative urges that are disruptive of the actual social order. The only way to justify that which is currently unjustifiable—due to “rigid social norms”<sup>25</sup>—is to “anticipate” an ideal (future) community from the point of which the particular creative subjectivity in question is justifiable.<sup>26</sup> The idealisation aims at an expansion

of that which is morally permitted or even valued. If such a justification fails, it seems that whenever I give in to these particular urges, I must at the same time disapprove of myself. But while justification of the reflective integration of new aspects of the self is necessary, it is not sufficient in order to realise the urges.

This explains the second recognition struggle, the recognition struggle between “me” and the social environment. In terms of respect and legal rights, it might be that self-realisation (here as integration) requires an expansion either of the scope of those who have legal rights or of the scope of the types of rights persons have.<sup>27</sup>

The image of selfhood we get from Honneth’s appropriation of Mead is one of an ongoing complex process of disruption, self-disclosure and mediation. At every stage, the individual depends on being recognised by others, while the discovery of novel aspects motivates struggles for recognition. Honneth draws out the harms of misrecognition to self-development in his appropriation of object-relations theory.

### **3.2.2. Object-Relations Theory, Mead and Practical Self-Relation**

One way in which misrecognition is severely harmful, and hence mutual recognition is essential, is in terms of practical self-relations described by the object-relations theory psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. Here the issue is not so much the personality of the individual but fundamental practical self-relation—that is, basic self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, mentioned above. According to Winnicott, who interprets data from therapeutic practice, the development and maintenance of each of these types of self-relation require ongoing participation in relations of (mutual) recognition. As mentioned previously, practical self-relations, in turn, are necessary for self-realisation or emancipation and so have moral value.

Basic self-confidence is described as trust in one’s physical integrity and independence and as an affirmative attitude towards one’s basic needs. It is formed first in relations between newborns and their primary caregivers and is maintained throughout life in loving relationships—for example, friendships and intimate romantic and sexual relationships. The type of recognition associated with basic self-confidence is love, as care for and appreciation of the concrete individuals (“united in their neediness” and “their dependence on each other”).<sup>28</sup> As an infant, the individual only acquires self-confidence in relations of mutual recognition with the primary caregiver.<sup>29</sup> This relationship undergoes changes, from “absolute dependence” of the newborn on the caregiver (and vice versa, since the newborn’s needs are perceived as indistinguishable from the caregiver’s own urges to respond) to “relative dependence”, where both the primary caregiver and the infant have gained a certain amount of autonomy from each other. This change involves struggles—for

example, the infant “attempts to destroy her [the mother’s] body . . . by hitting, biting, and kicking it”.<sup>30</sup> The infant is seen to struggle against the “mother’s” omnipotence as well as the child’s own loss of a similar omnipotence, experienced during the phase of symbiosis<sup>31</sup> where the child’s needs controlled the primary caregiver’s actions. The child also learns that the primary caregiver’s existence is independent of the infant (cannot be destroyed). “The child has thereby . . . actively placed himself or herself into a world in which he or she exists alongside other subjects”.<sup>32</sup> Equally, the primary caregiver is forced to recognise the infant as an individual with her own subjectivity. Ideally, the primary caregiver does not retaliate against the infant but continues to lovingly care. In this ideal case, the infant now learns to trust that even in a world that exists external to and independent of the infant, so in the absence of symbiosis, the infant’s needs are met because the infant is “of unique value to the other”.<sup>33</sup> As a result of a fragile and difficult-to-achieve balance between symbiosis and independence, the growing child has developed a basic self-confidence, which is essential for the formation of all personal relations and for the activity of continuous, creative self-disclosure described above. All love relations are characterised by affective care, trust and recognition of each other’s subjectivity so that among caregivers, family, friends, lovers and partners we can “be oneself in the other” (in Hegel’s terms) or be “ourselves” (in Honneth’s terms).<sup>34</sup>

Self-confidence, however, reaches beyond the sphere of love. It is a basic confidence that our needs are met, at the very least in the sense that our bodily integrity is not going to be violated and we can trust anonymous others not to murder, rape or torture us. Basic self-confidence is violated, then, and even destroyed, not just in faulty primary relations or love relations but also when others fail to recognise our bodily integrity and engage in rape or torture.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, the explanation of the formation of basic self-confidence in terms of recognition seems plausible. One might be suspicious of the details of Winnicott’s account of the relation between infant and mother, and Honneth has revised his account somewhat in light of other empirical evidence suggesting that Winnicott has overplayed the duration and degree of symbiotic relations between “mother” and infant.<sup>36</sup> The overall notion of the dialectic between dependence and independence and the impact of care for one’s needs on self-confidence, or, more precisely, the impact of neglect or domination on self-confidence, remains plausible and seems to be able to account for various “pathologies” in personal relations. While one might find an explanation of “torture” and “rape” in terms of “disrespect” or “misrecognition” inappropriate at first, since it seems to downplay the physical harm and violence of such acts, the loss of basic self-confidence is certainly one of the consequences that explain much about the kind of suffering individuals who have survived such violations endure. So the account that Honneth offers

here has explanatory powers. It can explain suffering and failures in relationships, which is unsurprising since the theory is partly derived from an analysis of pathologies. It should also help us understand the normative dimension of recognition.

Before assessing the link between misrecognition, psychological harm and moral injury, I want to analyse the other two types of practical self-relations that are formed and maintained only in and through relations of mutual recognition.

Self-respect, as regard for oneself as an autonomous, moral person, capable of reflection, of making valid judgements, making decisions and being accountable for the consequences of one's actions, is formed only through relations of mutual recognition. Developmentally, we learn to regard ourselves as autonomous agents, capable of rational reflection and judgement, when peers and primary caregivers consult our opinions and hold us accountable for our actions.<sup>37</sup> In other words, it is only through the respect of individuals whom we recognise as moral persons that we come to respect ourselves. Beyond the scope of family and peers, recognition of each other as moral persons is institutionalised in the ascription of rights and duties. By knowing myself as a person with rights, rights that protect the exercise of independent agency, I can regard myself with self-respect.<sup>38</sup> Here Honneth draws on Mead's idea of internalising the perspective of others. If others treat me as a morally accountable, autonomous agent, I regard myself in that way too. Honneth moreover points out that "modern law" (in liberal democratic societies) derives its legitimacy from the actual or hypothetical consent of autonomous citizens. It is thus based on the assumption of the autonomy of those to whom the law applies. Further, Honneth appeals to Joel Feinberg's thought experiment in which the inhabitants of "Nowheresville" find all of their needs taken care of, at the same level as in affluent societies, but they do not have rights. The assumption is that we would think that their not having rights would mean these citizens cannot develop self-respect.<sup>39</sup> Additional empirical evidence strengthens the link between rights and self-respect—for example, if we look at some of the psychological consequences of denying individuals rights, such as feelings of social shame and the effect on psychological health this might have.<sup>40</sup> Which specific rights individuals require in order to maintain self-respect is historically determined. New rights protect new aspects of persons and so allow development and realisation of those aspects, which releases new potentialities. Insofar as these new potentials require legal protections, struggles for recognition will ensue. Struggles for recognition are thus perpetual.

While self-respect is formed on the basis of the mutual recognition of features that are shared by all persons (it involves universality, in Hegel's terms), self-esteem is based on the recognition of unique qualities, traits, skills and achievements.<sup>41</sup> Having self-esteem or self-worth means regarding

myself as a valuable unique individual. The formation of self-esteem depends on my being recognised by others as possessing valuable traits. Developmentally, I begin to build self-worth through the experience of my peers esteeming me for specific skills.<sup>42</sup> There are different ways in which this esteem is expressed and one way in which social esteem (among strangers) is manifested is in terms of the distribution of goods (money) in the market sphere. Honneth thinks that, for example, the wages paid for care work are an expression of the way in which that type of work is valued socially and the individual wage might also take into account individual excellence in that type of work. Wages can become the object of struggles for recognition if they fail to reflect the social value of the contribution. I will discuss this view of the economic sphere in more detail in chapter 4. What is important is that we receive esteem for contributions we make to the good of that group which esteems us (society, neighbourhood, professional group). As mentioned above, Honneth proposes a “moderate value realism” here, which holds that the values of a society, according to which esteem is given, change over time, while appearing as objective values to those individuals who are “successfully socialized into the culture”.<sup>43</sup> In Honneth’s view, it is shared values and projects that constitute a society. These shared values and projects, which underlie social institutions and guide behaviours and expectations of members, including the distribution of esteem, must find the reflective approval of members or else institutions will not survive.<sup>44</sup> Given that socially shared values change over time, Honneth emphasises the notion of moral progress to avoid the danger of relativism, on the one hand, and he emphasises the context of value pluralism in modernity to avoid entrenched cultural oppression, on the other.<sup>45</sup> I will discuss both notions shortly, but first I want to return to the conception of self-esteem.

Formation of self-esteem operates similarly to the formation of self-respect, through the internalisation of the evaluative attitudes of others. By internalising the recognition of those whom I recognise, I come to see myself as a valuable, unique member of the group or society. Self-esteem is vulnerable to experiences of ongoing misrecognition. If individual characteristics, traits, skills or the characteristics associated with a culture or group that an individual belongs to are either not valued or denigrated, the individual’s self-esteem is affected and may be eroded. An experience of this kind of depreciation “deprives a person of . . . the social approval of a form of self-realization”.<sup>46</sup> Members of devalued groups could also lose the possibility of relating to each other in a positive way—that is, of participating in relations of solidarity. Honneth understands solidarity here not just in terms of the care of members of a group (of whatever scope) for each other but also in terms of the “symmetrical esteem” members have for each other because they regard each other as “collectively accomplishing” worthy aims.<sup>47</sup> While it is possible, as we will see below, to rescue solidarity, the negative effect of inter-

nalised devaluation on self-esteem and hence self-relations seems inevitable. Plausibly, even those individuals who pursue the devalued conception of the good or project will do so with a sense of shame or a sense of “not being as good as”.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.2.3. Feelings and Struggles**

So far, Honneth proposes a theory of recognition which distinguishes between three types of recognition in accordance with three different kinds of practical self-relation, which depend on mutual recognition and are undermined through misrecognition. All types of practical self-relations are fragile in the sense that, once formed, they continue to be vulnerable to the erosive effects of misrecognition. Exposure to misrecognition impacts on self-relation even in adults who grew up to develop good self-respect, self-confidence and self-esteem. The theory offers a plausible explanation for the effects of, for example, long-term unemployment (as a form of devaluation of skill) on self-esteem, the nature of shame, the inhibiting effect of having rights denied and the psychological destructiveness of rape and torture. Honneth now needs to connect violations of the recognitive conditions of practical self-relation to social struggles in such a way that some social struggles can plausibly be seen as recognitive struggles (motivated by misrecognition). Moreover, he must show that violations of genuine recognitive needs are moral wrongs and thus struggles for recognition are—in those cases—normatively (morally) grounded.

In order to show how misrecognition can be a motive for social struggles, and how some social struggles are best seen as struggles for recognition, Honneth supplements an analysis of the history of social movements with a particular theory of action, adopted from John Dewey. For Dewey, emotions, as positive or negative feelings, are consequences of the success or failure of our actions. Negative feelings as a response to failure shift our focus back on those instrumental and normative expectations that are frustrated. Emotional reactions that follow the violation of normative expectations are moral emotional reactions (“guilt” or “indignation”, depending on who violates the normative expectations, and/or “shame” if self-worth is affected, due to either the agent’s own action or those of partners of interaction). The emotional response to violations of normative expectation of mutual recognition (as love, respect or esteem) can thus reveal the normative dimension of recognition to violated individuals.<sup>49</sup> Awareness of the normative dimension translates into a struggle if it can be fruitfully articulated and is shared by (enough) others. An example here might be consciousness raising by second-wave feminists. Consciousness raising allows individuals to share their particular experiences. Through sharing and discussing together in groups, they develop and formulate their normative expectations more clearly (i.e. they

identify the wrong of an experience and identify it as moral wrong), they might find (new) ways to effectively name a particular type of wrong (e.g. “domestic violence” or “sexual harassment”) and they move from the level of personal feeling of indignation, guilt or shame to collective consciousness of a normative violation which can motivate collective social struggle.

Honneth’s theory can explain social movements like various feminist movements, LGBTQ+ movements, antiracist movements, the civil rights movement and workers’ movements in recognition theoretical terms. He thus also offers a normative reading of the demands of those movements. The civil rights movement is, for Honneth, an example of a struggle for respect, recognition of rights. The issue that motivates the struggle is the disrespect the members of some groups experience by being withheld rights that all persons ought to have. While the civil rights movement is a movement about the application of legal rights, parts of the feminist movement can be seen as struggles for esteem for care work. How appropriate the recognition theoretical explanation of justice claims is, is the subject of the next chapter.

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to point out that Honneth draws on other areas of empirical research (for example, history) to support his recognition theory. Like Habermas, Honneth interprets modernity as a type of moral progress that is characterised by increased differentiation. In the shift from feudal estate-based systems to modernity, the sphere of honour, which was determined by birth and which in turn determined rights and status, was differentiated into a sphere of universal rights and a sphere of social esteem. Both spheres themselves, in the course of history, also underwent (and still undergo) changes as a result of recognition struggles. While even universal legal rights used to pertain only to mostly white, property-owning men in liberal democracies, at least all human beings have fundamental human rights in theory now. Further, rights themselves have become more differentiated—there are human rights, political rights and social rights. This increased differentiation results from responding to recognition struggles about an increasing number of aspects of individuals which need to be protected. Alongside the gradual differentiation between the spheres of respect and esteem, love also became a principle of human interrelatedness, increasingly emancipated from economic or status concerns so that the sphere of love, as a third distinct sphere, develops in modernity. The historical narrative, alongside the psychological theories, strengthens the plausibility of three recognition dimensions as well as the idea of recognition struggles as a force of progress.

Before turning to the next chapter, I want to provide a brief outline of how the theoretical and empirical frameworks come together in Critical Theory. The normative, descriptive practical features of this theory will be explored and discussed in much more detail in the next chapter.

### 3.3. RECOGNITION THEORY AS CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

As a Critical Theory, recognition theory must be able to explain the normative value of recognition to complement the descriptive (explanatory) and motivational (practical) dimensions. So far, Honneth has proposed a recognition theory according to which individuals have a deep psychological need for recognition along three dimensions. Misrecognition or non-recognition constitute a severe psychological harm. The psychological need for recognition goes a long way in explaining the role that recognition plays in social struggles. We can understand why participants are motivated to engage in social action and we can see what the objects of recognition struggles are—that is, the application of recognition norms or the norms themselves. Drawing on Hegel, Honneth also offers a sophisticated and complex account of three different types of recognition and the role recognition generally plays in social reproduction and progress. He still needs to strengthen the moral dimension of his theory.

It is essential that Honneth can normatively ground recognition. Honneth positions himself against “postmodernism” and “relativism” and commits to a universally binding normative theory.<sup>50</sup> He takes the need for recognition to be a universal human need. The fact that we all require relations of mutual recognition is a trans-historical fact about human nature; however, what recognition in each of the recognition spheres precisely involves, for example, what rights individuals must have, is historically determined and culturally variable. So far, Honneth has offered a plausible, psychological account of the need for recognition. But the psychological harm of misrecognition, however severe, is not automatically also a moral harm. The psychological dimension of recognition alone does not establish moral right or obligations regarding recognition. In order to establish the moral wrong of misrecognition—and thus the moral demand for recognition—Honneth appeals to the value of autonomy and self-realisation. It is not clear how exactly autonomy relates to self-realisation—that is, whether we need to be able to exercise our autonomy in order to self-realise or whether self-realisation consists in exercising our autonomy. As we will see in the next chapter, some passages suggest that Honneth understands self-realisation as autonomy. Self-realisation, then, is the actualisation of our potential for moral agency. Whatever the precise relation is between autonomy and self-realisation, each requires the three types of practical self-relation.<sup>51</sup>

Honneth proposes a conception of autonomy that differs from a Kantian conception in important ways. Partly in response to insights from psychology and psychoanalytic theory, Honneth rejects three key tenets of traditional Kantian conceptions: self-transparency, self-control and the “orientation towards rational principles”, which involves disregarding particular desires, needs, feelings. Honneth holds that we must conceive of the (modern) sub-

ject as fragmented, internally conflicted and only partially self-aware. Drawing on Mead, he identifies a tension between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of the self. The latter constantly interferes with conscious projects and demands disclosure and integration. The process of self-disclosure is never completed. In light of this partial self-opacity, we cannot exert or even wish to exert self-control, insofar as this would require us to fix and hierarchically order our desires, values and projects. Such an ordering might preclude aspects of ourselves that are still to be discovered and thus might prevent integration and self-realisation. The process of self-disclosure is only possible if we participate in and have experienced relations of mutual recognition. We depend on mutual recognition, on the one hand, because we need to have the necessary positive self-relations in order to think of ourselves and our unconscious needs and desires as worthy of discovery, articulation and integration. Moreover, we will only engage in self-discovery if we can be assured of the “permanence of care”.<sup>52</sup> The need for an assured permanence of care relates back to the idea in Winnicott that we can only be alone if we know that our needs will continue to be met. Intersubjective dependence goes beyond the need for mutual recognition. As Honneth points out, we are also dependent on others to provide the (linguistic) cultural framework in which we can creatively articulate and so become conscious of novel aspects of ourselves. Again, this need for articulation is based on Mead’s assumption that we need to become an object, regard ourselves from a second-person perspective, in order to be able to grasp ourselves (or a particular aspect of our self) consciously. Overall, the account of decentred autonomy Honneth proposes could be classified as a relational capacity account of autonomy. Individuals are autonomous insofar as they can exercise capacities for self-disclosure and reflective integration.<sup>53</sup>

The conception of decentred autonomy is very closely connected to an idea of self-realisation as successful self-formation. This type of self-realisation requires that we possess basic self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth. These practical self-relations in turn require that we are in relations of mutual recognition in the different recognitive spheres. Self-realisation, as a normative good, thus serves as the normative foundation of the recognition theory.

At this point, it is also possible to say more about the view of emancipation at work in Honneth. It seems that emancipation at least involves self-realisation in the above sense. Honneth does not provide a concrete image of the self-realised or emancipated individual. He does not prescribe what emancipation looks like in detail, as that would undermine the autonomy of individuals. Further, a prescriptive view would undermine his commitment to the idea of the discovery and hence release of new aspects and potentials through the expansion of recognition. The lack of a detailed account of what the emancipated individual will look like might make it more difficult for

Honneth's theory to adjudicate between conflicting emancipatory movements and between recognition claims. He does offer some criteria—that is, the idea of moral progress, which means that legitimate or valuable recognition claims are those that increase either individualisation (more aspects of personality can be recognised) or inclusivity (they increase the number of people that can be recognised). However, this might not always clearly resolve conflicts. We will discuss this aspect of Honneth's theory in detail in the next chapter.

### 3.4. CONCLUSION

Overall, Honneth derives a theory of recognition from experiences of misrecognition. Experiences of misrecognition can indicate a violation of deep-seated, pre-theoretical normative expectations. Insofar as these expectations are valid normative expectations, they can then be justified by showing that the withheld recognition is necessary for the psychological integrity of individuals and a requirement for moral agency. This justification relies on the role recognition plays for the formation and maintenance of moral agency. We cannot become moral agents unless we are recognised in the right way—that is, in such a way that we can develop and maintain self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth.

This recognition framework allows Honneth to formulate a social theory that can provide a comprehensive account of justice (chapter 4), and it allows us to diagnose social pathologies. On the basis of the normative value of recognition, Honneth can formulate a recognition-theoretical formal conception of ethical life which provides a normative standard and practical orientation. The different aspects of his theory will be put to the test in the next chapters.

### NOTES

1. See Honneth, *Pathologies of Individual Freedom*; Honneth, *Freedom's Right*.

2. "Normative" is quite a broad term. There are rational, moral, ethical and social norms (as well as norms pertaining to health—as we see in chapter 5). The idea of normativity expresses "desirability", for example, according to rational, moral, ethical or social values or principles. In this book I will use "normative" to cover both moral and ethical desirability, where morality refers to universal, abstract norms and ethics to more concrete norms and values concerned with self-realisation. The paradigmatic moral theorist is the Kant of the *Groundwork*; the paradigmatic ethical theorist is the Aristotle of *Eudaimonian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Social desirability will, in the context of this book, be settled in reference to both moral and ethical desirability, while rational norms contribute (in the interpretation of social rationality offered by Critical Theorists) to self-realisation. The relation between ethics and morality will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

3. See Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition* (SfR); Honneth, *Reification*; Zurn, *Axel Honneth*.

4. Honneth, SfR, 18.

5. SfR, 18, 36–38.

6. SfR, 18.
7. SfR, 37.
8. SfR, 37–38.
9. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 64.
10. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 63–72.
11. SfR, 95.
12. See, for example, Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 66–72.
13. See, for example, Honneth, “Between Justice and Affection”, for a detailed account of the fragility of love relations.
14. SfR, 41–51.
15. See Honneth, “Grounding Recognition”; see also Ikäheimo, “On the Genus and Species of Recognition”; Laitinen, “Interpersonal Recognition”; and Ikäheimo and Laitinen, “Analyzing Recognition”. For a related discussion, see also Markell, “The Potential and the Actual”, and Honneth, “Rejoinder”, in *Recognition and Power*—although this discussion is initially focused more on Honneth’s appropriation of Mead, it also deals with the question of whether recognition unleashes new potentials in recognised individuals.
16. Honneth, “Between Aristotle and Kant”, 133.
17. Honneth, “Between Justice and Affection”, and Honneth and Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition*?
18. For a criticism of Honneth’s reading of Mead, see Markell, “The Potential and the Actual”.
19. SfR, especially, 75, though Mead does allow for some “blurring” of the distinction. So it can sometimes be the case that “I” becomes an object of consciousness and “me” activity. Markell, “The Potential and the Actual”, 126.
20. SfR, 75–77.
21. SfR, 77–78.
22. SfR, 81.
23. SfR, 84–89.
24. SfR, 83.
25. SfR, 82.
26. SfR, 83; Honneth, *Disrespect*, 190.
27. SfR, 85–86. Mead seems to think that these changes are brought about by “charismatic” personalities whose progressive (idealised) norms and convictions coincide with enough contemporaries to motivate social struggles through social movements (SfR, 85). Obviously Honneth does not want to rely on charismatic personalities, and if we look at social movements, while they require enough people coming together and sharing and articulating experiences and new normative experiences, they do not require a charismatic leader (e.g. consciousness-raising groups in the second-wave feminist movements, which managed to articulate concepts like “sexual harassment” and—eventually—brought about legal change).
28. SfR, 95.
29. The relation of mutual recognition between the young infant and the primary caregiver is complicated. While the primary caregiver (ideally) recognises and cares for the infant as subject with needs, the young infant does not recognise the primary caregiver as a subject with needs but rather as an independently existing entity (especially from the stage of “relative dependence” on); see SfR, 99–101.
30. SfR, 101. Here Honneth draws on Jessica Benjamin and her interpretation of this destructive phase as a struggle for recognition.
31. As we will see shortly, Honneth has modified his theory somewhat in light of new empirical findings. See Honneth, “Facets of the Presocial Self”.
32. SfR, 101.
33. SfR, 104.
34. SfR, 104.
35. SfR, 132.
36. See, for example, Honneth, “Facets of the Presocial Self”.
37. See, for example, Honneth, “Decentred Autonomy”.
38. See, for example, SfR, 118.

39. See SfR, 120. This particular argument seems problematic in various ways. First, it suffers from problems shared by many thought experiments—detail, framing and intuitions. Second, and in light of this appeal to intuitions (and the plausible view that intuitions import tacit beliefs—that is, might be ideological), it is generally not a strategy open to Honneth at key points. Lastly, it seems implausible that those citizens cannot develop self-respect since they can still experience their opinions as valued and their actions as having consequences.

40. SfR, 135. We will revisit the link between disrespect and notions of a different kind of pathology—social pathology—which is also indicated in these passages in chapter 5.

41. SfR, 113.

42. See Honneth, “Decentred Autonomy”.

43. Honneth, “Grounding Recognition”, 508; see SfR, 122, for the link between esteem and values.

44. Honneth adopts Polanyi’s and Parson’s view here.

45. Honneth, “Grounding Recognition”, 509.

46. SfR, 134.

47. SfR, 128.

48. SfR, 137.

49. SfR, 136–39.

50. See, for example, Honneth, “Decentred Autonomy”.

51. See, for example, Honneth, “Grounding Recognition”, 515.

52. Honneth, “Decentred Autonomy”, 189.

53. Honneth, “Decentred Autonomy”, 189. See also Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice”. For discussions of aspects of Honneth’s early recognition theory, see, for example, a collection of critical essays in Honneth, *Recognition and Power*; see also the “Symposium on Axel Honneth and Recognition”, published in *Inquiry* 45 (2002), with articles by Heidegren, Laitinen, Ikäheimo and Kauppinen (and a reply by Honneth); see also Petherbridge, *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays*.



## *Chapter Four*

# Recognition Theory, Morality and Justice

As a Critical Theory, recognition theory must combine a moral, social and political dimension as well as have a descriptive, normative and practical component. Descriptively, a recognition-theoretical social theory must be able to accurately analyse the (social) conditions of human emancipation as well as the mechanisms of oppression which prevent emancipation. An important task will be to formulate a conception of “social pathologies” and their role in maintaining oppressive structures and to be able to convincingly locate and diagnose them as well as the capacity to find a cure. The recognition-theoretical account of social pathologies will be discussed in the next chapter. This chapter will focus on the account of other mechanisms that undermine emancipation, specifically injustice, and the description of experiences of injustice as misrecognition. As a normative theory, recognition theory aims to formulate a normative framework, grounded in the universal human need for and thus value of recognition, that can serve as a standpoint of critique and guide and justify emancipatory social action. In contrast to “traditional”, mainstream moral theories, normativity should be grounded not in a priori, abstractly derived principles but in lived social reality—that is, it should be derived from everyday experiences that point towards transcending values, the intramundane transcendental. While the practical dimension is multifaceted and can be connected to the diagnosis of social pathologies, as well as the explanation, justification and guidance of social action, Honneth also understands recognition theory as having a political-theoretical aspect, the formulation of a recognition-theoretical account of justice.<sup>1</sup> This account of justice must be rooted in the moral dimension and match the descriptive account. It can then guide and justify political and social actions, such as policies, legal reforms or social actions aimed at (just) change. The precise

relationship between the justice framework and the pathology paradigm will be the subject of the next chapter. This chapter assesses recognition theory as a social, moral and political theory with a focus on the understanding of injustice. The first section will provide an outline of Honneth's position, starting and ending with his recognition-theoretical account of justice, which will be shown to be intrinsically linked to his social and moral theory as well as to the psychological and historical narratives introduced in the last chapter. The way in which the different aspects of Honneth's theory interlock is itself one of the strengths of his approach and must be considered in any discussion—although coherence is, of course, no guarantee of veracity. I will then move on to the critical discussion, focusing mostly on the 2003 debate between Nancy Fraser and Honneth.

#### 4.1. HONNETH'S RECOGNITION-THEORETICAL APPROACH TO JUSTICE

Based on the theory of recognition outlined in the previous chapter, Honneth formulates a recognition-theoretical account of justice. The normative basis of the account of justice is the role recognition plays in self-realisation. Self-realisation is an ethical good, and just societies are organised in a way to secure for their members the conditions of self-realisation. Self-realisation requires three types of practical self-relation, and practical self-relation in turn requires relations of mutual recognition along three dimensions or spheres of recognition, which are distinguished in terms of the different types of practical self-relation they facilitate. The just society is a society that affords all its members the possibilities for these required types of recognition. Given that certain types of recognition constitute the necessary conditions of practical self-relation, these types of recognition must be available to individuals as a matter of justice.

The different types of self-relations correspond to different expressions of the principle of recognition. From the previous chapter, we can recall that the first, fundamental, self-relation is self-confidence. Self-confidence is achieved and maintained through relations of love, understood as care for our needs. We gain self-respect, the second type of practical self-relation, through relations of respect for our capacities as autonomous persons who are accountable for our judgements and actions. This includes respect for our rights. The third practical self-relation, self-worth, develops through relations of esteem for our unique skills and their contribution to a project or the social good. The different principles of recognition correspond to different recognition spheres—that is, love, respect and social esteem. Honneth is adamant that these recognition spheres cannot be reduced to and are not synonymous with institutional complexes or institutional spheres. Most institutions re-

spond to more than one expression of the recognition principle. The family is, for example, the sphere of the principle of love, but it also has legal aspects. The equal rights of all family members are to be respected—a demand that is codified in law—while members should also respond to each other's needs. The economic sphere is understood to be normatively governed by respect and esteem.<sup>2</sup>

The recognition-theoretical account of justice that Honneth provides is a tripolar account, where justice is a matter of affording appropriate care, respect of legal rights and social esteem for contributions to the social good and to members of a society. Before turning to the critical discussion, I want to present especially the controversial points of Honneth's theory in more detail.

#### **4.1.1. Moral Theory**

As indicated above, Honneth normatively grounds his theory in the role recognition plays for practical self-relation, where practical self-relation is itself necessary for self-realisation or autonomy. Usually self-realisation is taken to be an ethical good rather than a moral norm or principle and thus self-realisation encounters problems when it is meant to be universally binding. In the light of the difficulties of combining an ethical good with universalist ambitions, it is only fair to provide a more in-depth exposition of Honneth's position here.<sup>3</sup> For this purpose, it might make sense to distinguish between an “empirical” and a conceptual motivation of Honneth's account. It is important to keep in mind that this separation is for expository purposes only, to better be able to draw out the various aspects of Honneth's highly sophisticated position. In Honneth, empirical consideration and conceptual motives are linked.

The “empirical motivation” consists in the descriptive power of recognition theory. Misrecognition is the best explanation for certain types of moral experiences, both in terms of capturing experiences most fully and in terms of matching the way in which subjects understand their own experiences of violations themselves. As mentioned before, Honneth hopes to access moral experience through the experience of moral injury. This “negativist procedure”<sup>4</sup> focuses on experiences of injustice. Rather than fitting those experiences into a framework that is constructed independently of lived social reality, Honneth is interested in how subjects interpret their own experience. There are at least two reasons for that, which were already mentioned in the first two chapters: First, there is the suspicion against self-proclaimed objective, ideal theories, based on apparently impartial reasoning that is common to the Critical Theory tradition. Second, Honneth is particularly aware of the classist aspects of our moral language—that is, the language of abstract principles and arguments. Among other things, the “Moral Consciousness

and Class Domination” essay is an appeal to be receptive to how those who are less privileged—and possibly more vulnerable to suffer injustices—interpret their own experiences and expectations. From a small sample of studies on the interpretation of moral experiences themselves, Honneth concludes that injustices are experienced as violations of recognition along different dimensions.<sup>5</sup> Bodily harm, torture and rape are violations that diminish or even destroy basic self-confidence, confidence in the integrity of one’s body. Deception and fraud are experienced as disrespect, and economic marginalisation as violation of esteem. What can be seen is that Honneth also provides a “phenomenology of misrecognition”. There are thus phenomenological differences not only in the degree and duration of the effects of misrecognition but also in terms of what aspect of self is affected. Hence, there is phenomenological support for a three-dimensional account of recognition and a tripolar account of justice. These empirical considerations should be read in combination with the psychological theories, discussed previously, that support his account of the nature and role of recognition for personal integrity.

Overall, the self-interpretation of subjects’ own experience of injustice, the phenomenology of misrecognition and the psychological theories Honneth draws on all support the idea that we can distinguish roughly three types of misrecognition in terms of how they affect the three aspects of personal integrity (self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth). This allows Honneth to formulate a conception of three distinct types of recognition, which should operate in distinct types of relationships and hence different kinds of social spheres. The recognitive requirements are different for different types of relation. Honneth emphasises at various points that relations of love can only hold between a limited number of people but respect is owed to all human beings *qua* humanity and esteem for those who contribute to the social good.<sup>6</sup>

The experiences Honneth analyses are moral because the kinds of harms caused by misrecognition hit at the core of moral agency. Subjects who lack basic self-confidence and/or self-respect and/or self-worth are subjects who do not conceive of themselves as moral agents.<sup>7</sup> Practical self-relation is thus important not only for an ethical conception of self-realisation but also for moral conception of autonomy. So, while Honneth focuses on the end of self-realisation, the conditions of self-realisation encompass the types of practical self-relation that are also necessary conditions for moral agency. In this way, recognition is a moral requirement as well as an ethical one. However, Honneth’s conception of self-realisation cannot be reduced to a Kantian conception of autonomy. In fact, as we saw in the previous chapter, Honneth rejects the Kantian account of autonomy in favour of a decentred account, which, though more plausible in the light of empirical considerations, loses the type of universal force the Kantian conception has. Honneth intends to go beyond Kantian autonomy and morality because that kind of universalism is

highly problematic. On the one hand, the degree of abstractness opens Kantian morality up to charges of “empty formalism”, which amount to denying it any practical, action-guiding value. It is also too abstract to fulfil a role in social integration. Social integration requires more concrete interpretations of shared values that members of a society can appeal to—and sometimes contest in the context of a shared vocabulary of value. The idea that morality and values have a social function—that is, social integration—means two things: First, individuals should recognise their own normative self-understanding in the values that govern society and should not feel either alienated or excluded (through aspects of their personality being unduly de-valued). Insofar as subjects do experience alienation or exclusion, they can raise recognition claims. Expanding recognition (when those claims are legitimate) thus contributes also to minimising alienation and exclusion and thus to social integration.<sup>8</sup> Second, to regard social integration as one of the ends of justice means that justice (and relevant values, rules and institutions) should enable and encourage individuals to be aware of and positively affirm—that is, recognise—the intersubjective conditions of autonomy and freedom and thus to see society as a cooperative community of subjects who mutually enable each other’s self-realisation. This feature is the focus of Honneth’s work on democracy (discussed in chapter 7) and his later work on social freedom (discussed in chapter 6), but it is present throughout his oeuvre.<sup>9</sup>

The critique of Kantian morality forms part of Honneth’s conceptual motivation for a theory of recognition. Honneth is especially concerned with two problems: the place of affection, emotion and body in a moral theory that focuses exclusively on cognition, and the protection of particularity in universalist moral theory, or, to put it differently, the place of ethics in moral theory. The way the distinction between morality and ethics is employed in this book (in line with Honneth), moral theory or morality refers to a normative theory based on and concerned with (abstract) universal values (for example, autonomy) and is usually associated with Kantian moral theory. Ethics is concerned with self-realisation and particularity and often involves thick conceptions of the good, which might differ from culture to culture and is thus not universal. Ethics refers to the type of normative theory usually associated with Aristotelian theories. Honneth, as well as Habermas before him, aims at integrating ethics in moral theory.

The concern with singularity, the protection and perception of particularity and the experience of unique original emotion also form part of Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s Critical Theory. As we saw in previous chapters, Adorno and Horkheimer claim that universalistic thought and language eventually eradicate particularity. Instrumentalist attitudes towards the world combined with an access to the world that is mediated by culture industry also eradicate our sensuality and ability to experience sense and emotions. Similar criti-

cisms can be found in some postmodernist thinkers—for example, Lyotard, White and Derrida. While the erosion of our ability to feel and sensually perceive the world is not a primary worry, Honneth reconstructs their critique of Kantian morality in terms of the protection of particularity. In Honneth, Lyotard and White are examples of two attempts to find a place for particularity in universalist moral theory. However, Honneth shows that both their attempts ultimately lead to some sort of discourse ethics, which, by itself, fails to account for particularity and affectivity. In Honneth's reading of Lyotard, the latter's focus on the obliteration of “the other” in and through communication, through the rules of language games and genres, means that his project must become similar to discourse ethics—if he wants an ethics that can practically intervene, rather than an ethics that can only bear witness to exclusion and obliteration.<sup>10</sup> White aims to protect particularity by fostering the ability to perceive particularity and be receptive to it.<sup>11</sup> Honneth argues that, ultimately, White also has to embrace something like discourse ethics if he wants to ensure that we perceive particularity rather than project it into the other. It is in free communication that the other can express particularity.

The example of discourse ethics Honneth has in mind is the Habermasian approach. Habermas distinguishes between ethics and morality as two different domains. Moral statements raise validity claims that seek the agreement of all concerned. In order for such agreement to be possible, these claims must be highly abstract, and Habermas thinks that there will be very few (if any) moral principles of this sort. Ethical statements, however, only seek agreement from members of a society. They are more concrete expressions of historically determined cultural interpretations of moral principles. The ethical sphere is bounded by the moral sphere in the sense that individuals cannot rationally agree to ethical principles that violate the moral principles they (also) agree to and hence recognise as valid. Apart from this particular integration of the ethical in the moral, Habermas also provides a space for a degree of affectivity in the form of solidarity understood as care. Members of political communities must be in relations of solidarity in order to accept the burdens of cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Habermas's conception of solidarity is complex, and I cannot do justice to it here at all. For Honneth's project, the relevant point is that “solidarity” does not go far enough to capture the devotion to another's particular personality that we find, for example, in love relations and friendship and which should be accommodated in a moral theory. Habermas, however, rejects more reliance on more affectivity (for example, reliance on empathy). According to Habermas, once empathy becomes a requirement of discourse, then “moral discourse quickly becomes dependent upon chance emotional ties”.<sup>13</sup> In accordance with a Kantian intuition, discourse should remain the “cooperative search for truth based solely on reasons”.<sup>14</sup>

Though solidarity is important in Honneth's approach too, it does not respond to radical particularity and affectivity. As we saw in chapter 2, there are other problems with discourse ethics, such as the danger of excluding individuals from equal participation because they lack the highly specific set of linguistic skills required to raise and justify claims in debate. Or they may lack the "right kind of conduct" required for participation, which includes specific linguistic skills, cognitive role taking and possibly other features.<sup>15</sup> There are further problems due to the underlying universalist and cognitivist nature of discourse theory. It follows from the emphasis on reason that discourse ethics can only make room for particularity insofar as it can be expressed in general terms (language). While Honneth insists that a universal element is necessary for a normative theory, and indeed a universal procedural element is necessary for the protection of particularity, Honneth aims at incorporating a higher degree of individuality and deeper emotions into his theory. Moreover, Honneth does not want to falsely dissolve the tension between these opposing moments of particularity and universality and the affective and cognitive.<sup>16</sup>

In order to properly draw out the unyielding, particular, asymmetrical and disturbing emotional moment, Honneth draws on Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. Derrida is committed to the radical particularity and otherness of the other and to radical devotion to the other. Affectivity and particularity are the marks of love and friendship and so locating their place in moral theory is fruitful for Honneth's purpose. It is no surprise that Honneth begins with an analysis of Derrida's account of friendship, where the friend is met as absolute particularity, whose radically unique needs and desires command my affective care and devotion and as instantiation of the universal human dignity, which commands my respect.<sup>17</sup> Drawing on Levinas and Derrida, Honneth offers an account of the radical asymmetry involved in loving care, the absolute demand of the other to care for particularity and its opposition to demands of equal treatment. In Derrida, the demand of the other and the demand of law to treat everyone as equal are two opposing perspectives which cannot be reconciled and between which we must choose in a context in which justifying our choice is impossible. Because we cannot rationally justify choosing one perspective over another at any given time, taking up a perspective appears as an arbitrary act of violence.<sup>18</sup>

Honneth's aim is to reconcile the two perspectives without losing the moment of opposition. So the conceptual aim is to formulate a theory that accounts for the Kantian universalist intuition of the equal worth of all human beings and their rational autonomy as well as providing a normative space for valuing particularity and for the moral nature of relations of love, which prioritise the particular other and are radically devoted to her specific needs. Both the dimension of particularity and affectivity, on the one side, and the dimension of universality and rationality, on the other side, should be

combined in such a way that responding to one dimension is not a violation from the perspective of the other dimension.<sup>19</sup> Recognition theory offers a solution. The different dimensions of recognition manage to combine the moments of universality and particularity without (falsely) dissolving the tension between them. Care for the individual needs and desires of the other in the sphere of love and—to a lesser degree—esteem for the unique skill of the other in the social sphere protect particularity, while universality is maintained both in the dimension of equal respect and in the universality of recognition itself.

Honneth attempts nothing less than a Hegelian overhaul of universalistic Kantian morality by securing a dimension of particularity and affectivity in morality. The starting point for the moral theory is universal human vulnerability, which leads to “radical dependence” on others.<sup>20</sup> The dependence is a dependence on others for care for our particular basic needs but also for universal respect and general esteem. All three types of recognition are essential for the individual to develop an identity and become an agent. They are the prerequisite of autonomy and self-realisation.<sup>21</sup>

While Honneth manages to reconcile the particular with the universal through recognition, he seems to have sidestepped the issue raised by Derrida, the tension between the demands of love and the demands of the law. Indeed, the tension is maintained in a different way in Honneth, as a tension between the demands of love, respect and esteem. As we will see below, this tension has to be resolved case-by-case, as it is not possible to establish a hierarchy between the different types of recognition. In some cases there might be no clear resolution and any choice will remain contested and provisional; however, in such cases Honneth has managed to provide a framework for contestation—that is, even in the case of tension between different expressions of the recognition principle, arguments must ultimately refer to the impact on practical self-relation (as well as inclusivity and individualisation, mentioned in the previous chapter and discussed in more detail below).

Honneth’s account shows very clearly that the three types of practical self-relation are not arbitrarily chosen; they correspond to different experiences of misrecognition and conceptual requirements for moral action at the same time. This does not make the corresponding distinction of the three spheres of recognition and their complex relationship to institutional spheres unproblematic; however, it does strengthen Honneth’s position and has to be considered in any discussion of the spheres.

Moreover, the division is also justified by the historical narrative Honneth offers.<sup>22</sup> Modernity is seen by Honneth as a process of increased differentiation, which begins with the emergence of capitalism and the simultaneous loss of an overarching metaphysical or religious shared belief which structures society. Thus modernity is characterised by greater mobility and increased formal equality. Capitalism and the end of the feudal structure of the

economy means that an increasing number of (white) men, at least, are free to offer their skills wherever they want. Freedom of movement coupled with demands for workers in the big cities leads to migration out of tightly structured environments. Social integration is no longer automatic through membership in a family or village. In the context of value pluralism that eventually follows from the breakdown of unifying religious or metaphysical belief systems, social integration becomes a problem, along with and intrinsically linked to the problem of alienation. Recognition emerges as a means of social integration, and the spheres of recognition emerge as differentiated social spheres. Birth or estate-based hierarchies are replaced by principles of equal rights and esteem-based hierarchies. Honneth here draws especially on Simon Thompson for a history of the development of the legal sphere and Barry Moore for history of the emergence of the achievement principle.<sup>23</sup> Again, historical studies on their own do not provide compelling evidence for the division of ethical life into three spheres or for the continued normative value of the three spheres. However, the support Honneth finds for his historical narrative is much less contested than his reliance on psychoanalysis, for example. The views of modernity as post-metaphysical, increasingly differentiated and beset by the problems of integration and alienation are widely held to be correct.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4.1.2. Three Spheres of Recognition**

Before returning full circle to the theory of justice, I want to provide more detail of the normative dimension, especially of the sphere of love and esteem.

The intimate sphere, which includes friendship and family relations, is governed by love as the expression of recognition. Love is care for the needs of individuals, and it is essential to allow individuals to gain self-confidence, the most fundamental practical self-relation. The sphere of love is also the sphere of affectivity, particularity and partiality. The concrete demands of love are particular to the individuals concerned and their relationship. The demands might encompass more or fewer aspects of a person. Moreover, love demands preferential treatment of the other. Partly this might be due to the increased vulnerability we have towards those we open up to and are emotionally attached to; partly this is just the nature of our affective bond. In the intimate spheres, which includes cross-generation relations between children and caregivers, romantic and sexual relations, friendships and the institution of childhood (understood in terms of specific needs and vulnerabilities), the expression of the recognition principle is love, which is understood as care for needs.

As a sphere of justice, the intimate sphere also allows for intertwinement with the principle of respect. To make sure that increased vulnerability does

not actually lead to increased harm in case of a breakdown of affective relations, partners and children in some intimate relations are protected. The protection again varies depending on the vulnerability addressed. When it comes to children, protection must go far enough to actually command care at least for basic physical and educational needs (care for emotional needs that require affectivity cannot be legally guaranteed, obviously). Protection of adults who can provide for their own basic physical and educational needs is limited to protection of dignity and physical and psychological integrity (enforceable laws against physical and psychological violence), though some economic provision might be made in recognition of economic dependencies that develop. That more than one expression of the principle of recognition might operate in the same institution or institutional sphere is an important feature in Honneth's account. However, he thinks that when in institutions of the intimate sphere appeal is made to the principle of respect in the language of equal respect, this is an indication of a breakdown of love relations.<sup>25</sup> Demands in both spheres are expressed differently because they appeal to different frameworks. In intact relations of love, expression of need is sufficient to count as a demand; in relations of respect, appeal must be made to universal rights.

Honneth also identifies a legal sphere in which recognition is expressed as respect, or more precisely, respect for our rights. Morally speaking, this sphere manifests Kantian intuitions of equality and universality. Protected here is the rational agency, or autonomy, of individuals, which can be undermined through deception and fraud, for example. In the recognition-theoretical account of justice, this sphere consists in enforceable legal rights or the principles according to which rights are granted. Appeals can be made either because rights are violated or because they are misapplied (for example, when a universal right is arbitrarily withheld from individuals or groups by the state).

Lastly, there is a social sphere, mostly the market, which is marked by esteem as the form of recognition. Esteem is to be given in accordance with the contribution individuals make to the social good. Honneth thinks that the “achievement principle” guides the “distribution” of recognition. There are struggles here about the social good and goals of society and, more often, about the interpretation of individual contributions. As a sphere of justice, the market is also a sphere in which esteem is intertwined with the principle of respect. Claims about the distribution of resources, where the distribution of resources is one of the currencies of social esteem, can be made on the basis of individual contribution and achievement or on the basis of equal dignity. It is important to point out that the sphere of social esteem is not the sphere in which claims about the value of cultural groups is mainly made. “Identity politics”, as usually understood, is played out in the legal sphere, with reference to universal rights and equal dignity, in Honneth.<sup>26</sup>

### 4.1.3. Theory of Justice

Justice claims must be raised in terms of one or more expressions of the recognition principle as explained above. For example, claims about unjust distribution might be raised in terms of equal respect or in terms of esteem. An equal respect distributive claim would have to show that not receiving a certain resource or amount of a certain resource affects equality or equal dignity or autonomy. Welfare policies are justified on this basis. But distributive claims can also be raised on the basis of esteem for one's contribution to the social good. Here the claim can take the form that one contributes to the social good, as understood by society, but this contribution is not recognised. Or one could claim that the contribution one makes is to the social good even though the particular conception of the social good is not recognised.<sup>27</sup>

### 4.1.4. Adjudication of Conflicting Claims

While the spheres can be distinguished, they are not completely separate, and injustice in one sphere might affect recognition in another sphere. Moreover, there might be conflicting claims between the different principles. For Honneth, such conflicts would be part of social life and can lead to moral progress. Struggles for recognition, after all, have, as Honneth shows in his historical narrative, led to an expansion of the normative sphere. What is not possible for Honneth is to rank the different dimensions. In terms of practical self-relation, care is the most fundamental recognition and self-confidence or the lack thereof determines our ability to enter into relations of recognition successfully in the other dimensions. However, Thompson holds, we can also rank respect as more fundamental to esteem.<sup>28</sup> It seems to me that in some contexts care considerations clearly outweigh other considerations, but this is not obviously always the case. Cases of conflict have to be considered individually. They would have to be treated similarly to cases of conflicting claims between individuals or groups. Claims are legitimate if they contribute to moral progress—that is, if the recognition demanded would either increase the aspects of persons that can be positively recognised or increase the scope of people or groups that can be recognised. The idea of moral progress is key to judging recognition claims. Honneth offers a historical narrative in which the moral achievements of post-traditional society are understood in terms of increased individualisation and increased inclusivity, an increase in aspects of the individual that achieve recognition and an increase in scope.<sup>29</sup> Increased individualisation is morally relevant because it allows new self-conceptions and widens the possibility of moral agency and self-realisation.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, Honneth offers a two-level adjudication procedure: first, recognition claims have to be able to be made in terms of the expression of the

principle of recognition, and second, the recognition demanded has to contribute to moral progress. Some problems still remain, as we will see below in the discussion with Fraser. Honneth argues that we can understand the claims made by social movements in terms of recognition claims in either one of these spheres. We can, for example, understand the claims of some care feminists as esteem claims (care as contribution to the social good). This is important for Honneth, as it indicates that his recognition theory corresponds to the normative self-understanding of subjects in his society and is thus indeed rooted in social life (as well as being justified with reference to culture-transcending considerations of the moral status of recognition). It also confirms the explanatory value of his theory. Lastly, it offers a framework in which conflicting emancipatory claims can frame their disagreement and try to justify the validity of their respective claims.

#### 4.2. FRASER'S CRITICAL THEORY AND CRITIQUE OF HONNETH

The debate between Honneth and Nancy Fraser is essentially a debate about the revival or continuation of the project of a Critical Theory that satisfies the “demands of the Frankfurt School”<sup>31</sup> in a radically changed world. Like Honneth, Fraser holds that such a Critical Theory must simultaneously be a social, moral and political theory. Critical Theory must encompass a descriptive, a normative and a practical dimension. While there are multiple points of agreement and disagreement between both philosophers, as well as some mutual misunderstandings, I will focus on the objections levelled against Honneth’s recognition theory as in principle mistaken on all three levels and will thus ignore some of the other, more subtle, issues. Fraser’s objections amount to claiming that as social theory, Honneth’s recognition theory fails to account for some relevant phenomena by misconceiving of the nature of the economic sphere as well as possibly reinforcing bias through his specific division of social life into three spheres of recognition. She claims that, as a moral theory, Honneth’s recognition theory fails because it is grounded in ethical principles and hence lacks universality. Moreover, it fails as a theory of justice, in her eyes, because Fraser claims that, if read as a thick ethical theory, it is sectarian and thus unable to yield impartial principles of adjudication; if read, however, as a *formal* (thin) ethical theory, it fails to be specific enough to be able to adjudicate conflict. Lastly, Fraser holds that given the inaccuracy of its descriptive dimension and the lack of normative force she sees in Honneth’s theory, it also fails as a political theory, since recommended remedies might either be ineffective or reinforce injustices.

In *Redistribution or Recognition?* (RoR), Fraser introduces an earlier version of her own conception of justice and of recognition. In order to better

appreciate her objections to Honneth, it makes sense to briefly introduce that position here. I should note, though, that her position has developed since the 2003 dialogue. She now proposes a three-dimensional rather than a two-dimensional approach. For reasons of brevity, I will focus here on the conceptions she proposes in RoR and will consequently later ignore objections to her account that are based on her neglect of a third dimension of justice concerned with political representation.

Fraser begins by observing a “false antithesis” between two folk paradigms of justice, which really need to be combined into one approach to justice. She distinguishes the redistributive paradigm from a recognition paradigm along several axes: their respective conceptions of injustice, the remedies they propose, the conception of the group that is the target of injustice and their different normative groundings.<sup>32</sup> On the redistributive paradigm injustice is constituted by maldistribution, which can consist of exploitation, deprivation and economic marginalisation.<sup>33</sup> The remedy is economic redistribution, which could involve a long-term restructuring of the distribution order—for example, through law. The subject of injustice is “class”, where class is defined as “socially entrenched [order] of subordination”<sup>34</sup> in economic terms. Consequently, class is always an indication of economic subordination and should be abolished. The recognition paradigm, by contrast, understands injustice in terms of cultural domination or disrespect, where domination takes place in and through interpretations of cultures and values, in communication and through misrepresentation. The target of this injustice is status groups, and the remedy is cultural change or deconstruction of institutionalised patterns of valuation.<sup>35</sup> Fraser adds that the idea of cultural harm includes material manifestations, expressed, for example, in physical violence against subordinated groups. Moreover, Fraser traces the roots of the redistributive paradigm to egalitarian liberalism, whereas the recognition paradigm arises from Hegelian thought.<sup>36</sup> One of the paradigms thus has a universal moral basis in Kantian thought, whereas the other one has (originally) an ethical and hence relativist grounding.

For Fraser, it is a mistake to conceive of justice either exclusively in terms of redistribution or exclusively in terms of recognition; consequently, she rejects “economist” and “culturalism”. Rather, justice has two (later three) irreducible dimensions, which we can and must analytically distinguish, although they are practically always intertwined.<sup>37</sup> She argues by way of a thought experiment in which she constructs ideal-typical cases of purely economic and purely cultural injustice. We can conceive of an injustice that is caused purely by exploitation and deprivation of a class understood in orthodox Marxist terms. In this sort of ideal-typical economic injustice, we might concede that maldistribution also has status effects on the exploited class (for example, prejudices of “pauperism”), but the root of injustice is exploitation and deprivation, and the only remedy required is of a redistribu-

tive nature.<sup>38</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, we can imagine groups of people being denied cultural respect on the basis of their sexuality. We can again concede that this ideal-typical recognition injustice might have material effects, but the root of the injustice is the cultural valuation of “despised sexualities”.<sup>39</sup> Between those ideal-typical constructions we have mixed forms of injustice, which all have cognitive and redistributive dimensions. These injustices need to be analysed and remedied from both the perspective of the redistributive and the perspective of the recognition paradigm. Here, Fraser offers an in-depth discussion of racism, various forms of sexism and actual (non-ideal typical) class struggles.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Fraser holds that even injustices that might have been rooted originally in only one sphere have side effects in the other dimension. If left “untreated”, these “side effects” become independent and self-perpetuating. Even in those cases, both paradigms must be applied. Therefore, when we analyse our ideal-typical constructions, we have to admit that while the original cause might have been exclusively economic in the case of Marxist class oppression or purely cultural in the case of institutionalised heterosexism, once the original side effects have been left to fester, they need to be addressed in their respective dimension. The cultural prejudice towards the oppressed class does not disappear once poverty is alleviated. As a rule, injustices have cognitive and redistributive dimensions, and these dimensions intersect in specific ways. Both the dimensions and the intersections must be addressed. Insofar as this account of the dual nature of injustices is correct, the dual perspective approach is important because both dimensions, with distinct harms and distinct remedies, must be rectified, and the remedies themselves must be assessed in terms of their effects on both aspects. Here, Fraser uses the example of income support to make her point. Income support might be an effective means of redistribution of material resources to those deprived, but because of the social stigma attached to recipients of income support, it might be a strategy that leads to increased status subordination of the poor. To properly address the problem of deprivation, one needs to also address the cultural consequences of redistributive measures.<sup>41</sup> The two dimensions Fraser proposes are not just analytic constructs; they are also perspectives that must be taken on any injustice to avoid worsening the situation for those who already suffer an injustice.

It is important to emphasise that Fraser does not propose a “substantive dualism”; in fact, she rejects a rigorous division of social life into an economic sphere as the realm of the redistributive paradigm and a cultural sphere as the realm of the cognitive paradigm. Rather, she advocates that we take a dual perspective on injustices. The two dimensions are aspects of justice or injustice that are combined under an overarching principle of justice, the idea of participatory parity.<sup>42</sup> Maldistribution and status subordination are understood, measured and evaluated in terms of their effect on participatory parity.

They are wrong because they disturb participatory parity. Those who lack either the resources or the respect to participate as full and equal persons suffer an injustice because of it. Fraser derives participatory parity from—and at one point even equates it with—equal autonomy. While the interpretation of equal autonomy as participatory parity is not as straightforward as Fraser would suggest,<sup>43</sup> it is *prima facie* plausible to think that equal autonomy requires equal opportunity for participation in matters that determine the social and political order of society. In light of this plausible link between participatory parity and autonomy, Fraser is justified in claiming that her account of justice is grounded in liberal deontology, a universalist moral theory.

Moreover, as can be seen above, Fraser reconceives of recognition in terms of status. Here she distinguishes between the recognition approaches of Honneth and Charles Taylor, which understand recognition in terms of its contribution to personal integrity, and her own approach, which focuses on status, which in turn is understood in terms of parity. Fraser claims that other recognition approaches focus on psychological attitudes of recognition, or at least model their approach on the intersubjectivist paradigm of mutual recognition, where recognition is an attitude towards another subject. Fraser, by contrast, focuses on institutionalised patterns of valuation, such as prejudices against groups that might be codified in law (e.g. prejudice against homosexual partnerships).

With this rather brief outline of Fraser's position in place, we can now turn to the debate between Honneth and Fraser.

#### 4.3. FRASER VERSUS HONNETH: SOCIAL, MORAL AND POLITICAL DISAGREEMENTS

Fraser argues that Honneth's recognition theory is insufficient as a social theory and fails as a moral theory, and, as consequence of both, she finds it wanting on the political level as well.

##### 4.3.1. Social Theory

On the social level, Fraser finds Honneth's recognition-theoretical account problematic because, in her eyes, he insufficiently grasps some of the mechanisms of oppression and reinforces others by mis-describing society. There are two issues I want to focus on here: Honneth's recognition-theoretical account of the economic sphere and Honneth's division into three spheres of recognition.

#### 4.3.1.1. *Economic Sphere*

Honneth's recognition-theoretical account of the economic order seems to amount to his claiming that the economic sphere is normatively ordered, mainly in accordance with two expressions of the recognition principle: equal respect and esteem.<sup>44</sup>

Honneth argues for the economic sphere as normatively ordered already when he rejects Habermas's system-theoretic account and in fact rejects the system-lifeworld distinction. As mentioned in chapter 2, for Honneth, the system-theoretic account fails to consider the emancipatory potentials in the economic sphere. It thus fails to properly grasp the struggles for improved working conditions and rights and cannot properly grasp workers' movements, consumer movements or other forms of protest against certain working conditions, trade relations and so on as emancipatory struggles. Moreover, a system-theoretic view of the economic sphere undermines the critical potential of Critical Theory by robbing it of the notion of "alienated labour" as a tool for critique. Further, it seems descriptively inaccurate, since societies depend for their survival and reproduction on the consensus of members.<sup>45</sup> This means that societies' continued existence depends on the normative self-understanding of participants. It is not at all plausible that the economic sphere escapes this normative demand, especially if we accept that the economic sphere is embedded in and dependent on other social structures and institutions like, for example, modern law, and here especially laws and legal principles relating to property and contracts. Apart from institutions, the economic sphere also depends on individuals' specific socialisation, which enables them to cooperate with the demands of various aspects of the economy. As we will see below, Honneth's idea of the role recognition plays in the market extends beyond mere embeddedness. Recognition, as the binding normative principle, also determines the structure and institutions in capitalist economy. The disagreements with Nancy Fraser, then, about the nature of capitalist economy are in some ways reminiscent of Honneth's criticisms of the Habermasian system-lifeworld distinction, discussed in chapter 2. Honneth insists, against Habermas and Fraser, that the economic sphere is not only morally embedded but also governed by normative principles that participants support.

In light of the account of justice that Fraser proposes, Honneth's position must strike her as highly problematic. On the one hand, she holds it to be a descriptively false account of the capitalist order and the economic sphere more specifically. It is an implausible position given that the economic sphere is governed by a variety of non-normative, non-consensual processes and mechanisms, such as the laws of supply and demand. She provides the example of a skilled white male worker, who is respected and esteemed but becomes unemployed because of a corporate merger that goes wrong.<sup>46</sup> The

unemployment is not due to lack of esteem for the unique skill set or racist or sexist prejudice but to “autonomous” market mechanisms, which are “decoupled” from a normative order. According to Fraser, insofar as Honneth’s descriptive account of the capitalist social order is mistaken, his analysis of economic injustices is also faulty. Merely focusing on recognitive aspects of distribution will not facilitate an appropriate response to maldistribution caused by recognition-independent mechanisms. The charge is twofold: Honneth’s account of capitalist economy is inaccurate, and, as a result, his account of economic injustice is also wanting.

In his response, Honneth emphasises that he does not aim to provide a recognition-theoretical account of the capitalist order and market mechanism. Rather, he intends “to reveal the moral ‘constraints’ underlying social interaction on different levels”.<sup>47</sup> He wants to arrive at an account of social integration. Given that Honneth conceives of society and social reproduction as dependent on the moral self-understanding and affirmation of its members, the account of social integration must be of the “deep” normative framework that binds members. Honneth’s response has been subject to some controversy. Christopher F. Zurn and Thompson point out that it seems to contradict other remarks Honneth makes.<sup>48</sup> Following this tension, it seems that two different readings are possible. What Thompson calls a weak reading simply holds that recognition plays some role in capitalist economy, but it is not the sole determining factor. This reading seems descriptively plausible, but it fails to support Honneth’s more fundamental point of a recognition-theoretical understanding of redistributive injustice. Thompson and Fraser must think that if there are non-recognitive mechanisms at work that cause maldistribution, then recognition cannot constitute the sole point of analysis (or, indeed, the sole remedy), even if recognition is differentiated into legal, social and care principles. The strong reading claims that recognition fully governs the economic sphere. This would provide support for the recognition-theoretical account of distributive injustice, as it claims that legal respect and social esteem directly determine distribution. However, this reading is empirically implausible.<sup>49</sup> It seems Honneth is left with a dilemma of having to choose between either a descriptively plausible thesis that fails to support his theory of justice or a descriptively implausible thesis.

However, it is not clear why Honneth should have to show that recognition is the sole or main determining factor of the structure of economy and the distribution of resources in order for it to be the only relevant principle of justice. As a Critical Theorist, it is important for Honneth to recover the normative and emancipatory potentials that are contained in the economic sphere (e.g. the critical potential of “work”), without thereby having to claim that all mechanisms are normatively determined. For a theory of justice, what matters is the “handling” of the distribution of privileges and burdens; some of these burdens and privileges might be the result of non-normative, techni-

cal processes. But the distribution of the costs of the outcomes of non-normative economic mechanisms is not determined by those mechanisms. How a society compensates for disadvantage and distributes advantage is a normative decision. If we stick with Fraser's example, we might say that it is the task of a theory of justice to ensure that—despite non-normative, economic mechanisms—the effect on individuals is such that they can still partake in the vital relations of mutual recognition and participate with dignity as autonomous equals with others. This might be achieved partly by introducing non-stigmatised welfare provisions or by ensuring there are sufficient opportunities for dignified work for all. Thus, it seems the terms of analysis of injustice are not the same as the terms of analysis of the economic system and mechanisms.<sup>50</sup>

#### *4.3.1.2. The Traditional Division of Ethical Life*

As we know, Honneth distinguishes three spheres of recognition, each corresponding to a distinct expression of the recognition principle and to a distinct form of self-relation. The relation between recognition spheres and institutional complexes is complex, and recognition spheres do not neatly map onto institutional social spheres. Both the legal respect and achievements principles of recognition can operate in the economic sphere, and legal respect and love operate in the family. Nevertheless, distinguishing three spheres of recognition in a way that is reminiscent of the traditional division between family, legal and social spheres is potentially problematic and has met with criticism.

This traditional division, found in Hegel, affirms a deeply gendered social structure, in which women (conceived of in the traditional gender binary) are meant to provide care work in the private, family sphere, and men are supposed to gain paid employment and thus social recognition for their skills in the social sphere. Gainful employment not only allows for economic independence but also aids self-realisation and increases self-esteem (through social esteem). Women are excluded from economic, social and psychological benefits of (unalienated) labour and are thus undermined or severely limited in developing and maintaining a self-conception as moral agents. It is obvious that Honneth is both aware of and opposed to such social structures. In fact, he thinks that his recognition theory is opposed to gendered injustice and can justify and explicate some of the feminist demands about recognition of care work, rights to physical integrity in partnerships and outside rights to seek employment and equal pay for equal work, to list but a few. In his debate with Fraser and in his engagement with Beate Rössler and Iris Marion Young, for example, it is obvious that Honneth is aware of the ongoing devaluation of care work (broadly construed as including care for the sick and elderly as well as care for children, including necessary housework) as

well tendencies to denigrate any type of work once it is considered “women’s work”, which is once it is perceived as a profession also practiced by women. Further, he is aware of difficulties associated with economically rectifying these forms of injustice. For example, he is aware that simply turning care work into paid labour along the current paradigm would be extremely problematic and threaten to reduce relationships that are to some degree constituted by affectivity to economic relations, thus eroding affective relations to some degree.<sup>51</sup> Honneth’s theory exposes the psychological, social and moral importance of care. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Honneth is able to account for the value of the deep affective nature of some forms of care and values love relations for that affectivity.<sup>52</sup> However, he vastly underestimates the fact of, and problem with, asymmetries of care in love relations. As Young points out, care relations are typically asymmetrical in the sense that those who care, while caring, cannot participate in other work, while those who are in need of care cannot themselves provide it—at least at the same time.<sup>53</sup> Honneth rejects the idea that relations of care are always or typically asymmetrical. While he admits that caring for those in need is asymmetrical, he thinks the kind of care in loving partnerships and friendships is of a more reciprocal kind.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, while Honneth manages to account for the moral value of care and love, he seems to underestimate the degree to which the historically developed understanding of the “achievement principle”, with its focus on efficiency and profit, is ill equipped to incorporate care. So, while it is plausible to understand some care-feminist demands as demands for social esteem of care work, it is difficult to conceive of that type of social esteem as determined by the achievement principle. Young’s point is that the relation between achievement, esteem and care must be re-worked.<sup>55</sup> In principle, this seems to be possible, and Honneth would regard struggles over our understanding of “achievement” and of social esteem as the kind of recognition struggles that motivate moral progress.

Lois McNay has slightly different, albeit related, worries. She is concerned with the degree of idealisation at work in Honneth’s account of love and family. As we have seen in previous chapters, love relations in the family and partnerships, mutual care for each other’s particular needs and interests, is what enables individuals to regard others as essential to self-realisation. The experience of care allows us to understand our freedom as intertwined with the freedom of others and so motivates us to accept obligations. It is vital for democratic life. The sphere of love is also the location of important changes in terms of the sexual division of labour, the protection of vulnerabilities and an expansion of the aspects and needs of personalities that are thought to require care, as well as the recognition of diverse types of family and love relations. In recent decades, the sphere of love has seen many progressive changes in terms of the legal protection and recognition of di-

verse partnerships and family models. The “democratisation” of love at the same time presents an example of progress and also underwrites the importance of love relations and family for realising social freedom. However, Honneth’s description of the relation between child and caregiver and between adult partners—in short, the description of the sphere of love relation—is overly positive. Drawing on a variety of studies, McNay argues that while there is evidence that more subjects gendered as women have entered the workforce and more subjects gendered as men take on some household duties and some care duties, evidence suggests that female subjects still find themselves predominantly in low-paid, low-esteem jobs. To fully appreciate the force of her position, it makes sense to reiterate the data here. Subjects gendered as female are paid on average 10 percent less than their male counterparts are. In addition, even when in full-time employment, they still take on the majority of the housework, including care work and managing household tasks. Moreover, it is still the case that 90 percent of single-parent households are headed by women. Given the link between single-parent households and poverty rates, women are more affected by poverty. When it comes to the commodification of care work and attempts to combat a care deficit, caused partly by the combination of commodification and privatisation of care work as well as welfare cuts, it is predominantly female migrant workers from poorer countries that do the work, thus reproducing gender and racial oppression.<sup>56</sup>

Intimate partnerships and marriage are not governed exclusively by love but also by money and power.<sup>57</sup> The family is still the location of gendered “soft domination”<sup>58</sup> in which power asymmetries are reinforced and reproduced, and different dimensions of power asymmetries increase inequalities among members of a family or partnership as well as between families who are affected differently by, for example, economic structures. Insofar as families are affected differently by socioeconomic policies and economic structures, there is little basis for solidarity among families, as there might be little shared experience and—instead—a certain amount of competition for advantages.<sup>59</sup> While Honneth would admit that, he underestimates the impact this has on the lived experience of interactions. Where Honneth thematises the influence of economic demands on love relations—for example, in his discussion of the “entreployee” and the pathologies of organised self-realisation<sup>60</sup>—he, on the one hand, underestimates the degree to which intimate and economic spheres have always been intertwined and, on the other hand, fails to appreciate the emancipatory promise of this intertwinement especially for women. McNay identifies “conservative” tendencies in Honneth’s essay when he bemoans the destructive effects on intimate relations of increasing demands of flexibility and emotional involvement in the sphere of labour. She thinks that part of the fragmentation Honneth bemoans is a result of the increased economic independence of women who enter the labour market.<sup>61</sup>

This seems to be a misreading of Honneth. Honneth identifies the harmful effects of, for example, flexible working hours that are not related to the emancipatory demands which open up jobs to women or allow women to pursue a career while also being primary carers. Rather, what Honneth criticises is the abuse of originally emancipatory demands for the purpose of increased oppression and exploitation. Honneth is concerned, for example, about the effect of “negative” flexibility, the precarious zero-hour contracts and gig economy which require that people quickly move from one type of job to another, possibly with the need to relocate, and sometimes call for unforeseen hours and availability at all hours. It is thus a flexibility combined with high insecurity. Moreover, it is a flexibility that does not leave room for genuine “leisure” time, since twenty-four-hour availability seven days a week is a form of constantly being “at work”. This flexibility is distinct from demands for flexible working hours that allow genuine long-term planning as well as genuine restriction in terms of working hours. However, while the charge of conservatism is unjustified in that respect, it is true that Honneth underestimates the emancipatory effects of the intertwinement of the different spheres and that an insistence on the separateness of the domestic and public is in danger of inviting a reproduction of sexual divisions of labour.

Honneth’s focus on the positive changes means that he loses sight of various deep-rooted problems that present formidable obstacles to self-realisation, including negative developments and the complicated interplay between gendered, economic and care inequalities. This means that he underestimates the contentious and radical nature of political measures necessary to redress power asymmetries, and, possibly more worrying for Honneth, his normative framework might be rooted in a reconstruction of social reality that is selective and idealising to the extent of losing any descriptive accuracy. However, if the account of love and family is too far removed from social reality, Honneth’s theory moves close to ideal, constructivist theories he criticises.<sup>62</sup> Honneth must show more awareness of intra-familial structures of oppression and also the impact that these have on self-formation. We will discuss the problem of idealisation in more detail in chapter 8.

It seems that there is, moreover, an underlying problem with the distinction of the three recognition spheres. While feminist struggles and the wrong of the oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of women can be understood in recognition-theoretical terms, the historical development of this division into three spheres means that traces of the traditional Rousseauian and Hegelian view of family and social spheres and of the sexual division of labour are still effective. The division into spheres that roughly cohere to the Hegelian model invites a continuation of gendered-role thinking. It seems no accident that there is a difficulty of combining the sexed aspects of the intimate sphere with the other two spheres. This difficulty might be reason enough to rethink the division and critically analyse the empirical evidence

that seems to compel that division. One might find, for example, that traditional sexual division of labour is at work in Winnicott too. While Honneth revises the psychoanalytic account of child development, he does not spell out how or whether this modified account of the genesis of the self affects his model of parental love as a prescriptive ideal.<sup>63</sup> Not only is the account idealised, but it also evokes images of the women's role as mother and wife.<sup>64</sup> The problem is that Honneth seems unwittingly and against his will to import oppressive traces of traditional views that are still effective and ease the way for gendered injustice. However, while the exact interaction between spheres is under-theorised, Honneth presents overwhelming evidence for the plausibility of a distinction of three different spheres that respond to distinct expressions of the recognition principle and are involved in different types of practical self-relation. If Honneth's account thus evokes traditional sexist views and images, it is a testament to the pervasiveness of those images still today. As such, this should be subject of analysis. It does not, however, necessarily point to a weakness in Honneth's account, though Honnethians need to take into account those unwanted effects and turn them into social analysis and critique.

### 4.3.2. Moral Theory

There are two related problem areas Fraser identifies: Honneth's reliance on moral psychology and the teleological and ethical nature of his "moral" theory.

#### 4.3.2.1. *Moral Psychologism*

For Honneth, the wrong of misrecognition consists in the harm it does to the psychological well-being of individuals. More precisely, misrecognition is a "moral injury" because it undermines or even destroys those fundamental self-relations that are necessary for individuals to self-realise and interact with others as equally autonomous agents with dignity. Honneth's account of "moral injury", which drives recognition theory, relies on the psychological harms of misrecognition and on how these harms interact with the psychological makeup of individuals. The "moral psychologism", as Fraser calls it, is problematic for several reasons. On the one hand, Fraser points out that the theory's status depends on the standing of relevant psychological theories.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, because the harm is the impact on self-relation, there is a danger of "victim blaming" or, at the very least, of shifting the burden to increased "resilience" on the side of the victim. In a similar vein, because the injustice is—according to Fraser—sometimes "equated with prejudice in the mind of oppressors",<sup>66</sup> rectifying it seems to require policing beliefs if misrecognition is modelled on intersubjective, face-to-face relations of recognition. However, Fraser seems to underestimate the complexity of Honneth's recognition

theory here. While Honneth starts off with face-to-face relationships, and while they are important for the formation of successful self-relations, his conception of recognition and misrecognition encompasses institutions and social structures as well.<sup>67</sup> Of course, it might be that the character of institutions, including their tendency to foster respect (or not), depends on the evaluative beliefs and prejudices of members of society whose consensus is essential for the continued survival of these institutions.

There are two more problems Fraser raises that are especially relevant for recognition theory insofar as it also aims to serve as a theory of justice. Insofar as the wrong of misrecognition is essentially psychological, it is harder to observe. Injustice is no longer a publicly observable objective fact but one that relies on the reporting and sincerity of those affected.<sup>68</sup> Here Fraser can reverse Honneth's objection to her account. Honneth claims that—implicitly—Fraser relies on social movements to have identified injustices, so that Fraser can only explain those injustices that are already articulated and have found broad public support.<sup>69</sup> Against Fraser, Honneth points out that critical theories must be equipped to identify even—or possibly especially—“silent” injustices which have not been expressed at all or not been expressed sufficiently convincingly in public. Honneth's point here relates back to a criticism of Habermas's discourse ethics. Honneth holds that being able to express moral experiences and beliefs in terms of general principles and valid arguments is not the same as having moral experiences. Reducing moral experiences to the expression of moral experiences excludes the less privileged classes unduly. Whether Honneth can locate “silent injustices” depends on how specific his anthropological account is—that is, his account of the specific cognitive needs of human beings *qua* human beings or even *qua* human beings in a specific social order. If his account is specific, it is possible to determine, externally, that individuals or groups experience misrecognition, even if those individuals or groups fail to express or even subjectively suffer, with reference to objective cognitive needs. For example, we can determine child neglect without relying on children's reports.<sup>70</sup> However, Honneth must be careful not to be overly specific, as that would commit him to a thick conception of the good and hence to sectarianism (see below).

Lastly, Fraser holds that the identification of moral wrong with psychological harm adds further problems to the adjudication between conflicting recognition claims. As we will see below, such an adjudication is difficult for Honneth for other reasons, but the possibility that the rejection of morally obnoxious recognition claims harm the morally obnoxious claimants in their fundamental self-relation, which constitutes a moral wrong, presents further difficulties.<sup>71</sup> Before responding to the adjudication problem, I want to consider a further issue that adds to the difficulties for adjudication: the ethical nature of Honneth's theory.

### 4.3.2.2. Ethical or Moral Theory

Honneth grounds his theory in the value of self-realisation. Self-realisation is usually associated with ethical theories. Implicit here is the Habermasian distinction between morality and ethics, which reflects the scope of both. In Habermas, moral claims are claims that are deemed valid universally, so everyone affected could agree to them, whereas ethical claims, which are more concrete, historically determined cultural interpretations of moral claims, seek agreement from members of a society only. Fraser does not present her objection in explicitly Habermasian terms; nevertheless, the distinction clearly motivates the objection. Partly, the objection is further motivated by what Fraser perceives to be the demands on a theory of justice, which will be discussed below (though it is a closely related problem). Fraser thinks that as an ethical theory, a theory about the good rather than the right, recognition theory must be sectarian; it is partisan to specific conceptions of the good at the cost of other conceptions of the good.<sup>72</sup>

Honneth's initial response here can be to insist that he avoids sectarianism because his is a *formal* conception of the ethical life. He draws out universal conditions for human beings' ability to self-realise, where self-realisation is no more a "thick" concept than moral autonomy. As we have seen previously, he relies on a formal account of the types of practical self-relation that human beings need to maintain in order to be able to conceive of themselves as moral agents.<sup>73</sup> However, Honneth's insistence on the formal nature of his cognitive standards now opens him up to Fraser's second objection, that Honneth's theory lacks the determination necessary to actually guide political institutions or actions. In other words, insofar as Honneth avoids sectarianism by refusing to flesh out the cognitive standards, he fails to be in a position to adjudicate conflicting claims or otherwise offer practical guidance, which is a demand especially on the moral dimension of Critical Theories. Moreover, because recognition theory is ultimately grounded in the value of self-realisation, it is an ethical theory rather than a moral theory. The concrete conditions for self-realisation depend on the concrete social situation and may vary from society to society, opening the theory up to relativism and sectarianism. The alternative would be to remain on a level that is abstract enough to be universally binding, a highly formal conception of the ethical life that falls victim to the charge of "empty formalism".

It seems that some of these charges reflect unwarranted demands on a critical moral theory. Critical Theorists cannot simply provide objectivist accounts of legitimate needs. What Honneth manages is to provide standards of a debate about the legitimacy of recognition claims. His theory of justice outlines the criteria of legitimacy: Claims must be made in terms of the three expressions of the recognition principle, and they must be such that granting recognition increases either the scope of characteristics of a person that can

be recognised (individualisation) or the scope of individuals who are recognised (inclusion).

### 4.3.3. Political Theory

#### 4.3.3.1. Theory of Justice

Fraser raises three problems for Honneth's recognition-theoretical account of justice. First, insofar as adjudication remains a problem, it is especially a problem for a theory of justice whose function is to judge different recognition claims. The most pressing problem here is the impossibility of ranking the recognition principles. But even if we accept that conflicts between the different expressions of the recognition principles—that is, conflicts between the demands of respect and esteem, esteem and care or care and respect—have to be decided on a case-by-case basis, there are still further problems. The choice between either “secularism” or “empty formalism” remains a problem for Honneth's recognition-theoretical account of justice.

Second, Fraser insists that a theory of justice ought to be universally binding and thus ought to be based on (universal) moral rather than (relativistic) ethical principles. Conceiving of recognition as status subordination, as she does, and explaining the wrong of status subordination in terms of the egalitarian principle of participatory parity is one way to achieve a universal moral ground. But as we have just seen, the ethical basis of Honneth's recognition theory is not universally binding. In light of what has been said about Honneth's moral theory, there are many possible responses here. On the one hand, the relations of mutual recognition Honneth outlines are important for moral agency and autonomy, where autonomy also is a universal principle. On the other hand, it is clear that the precise content of recognition claims and struggles are culturally relative and potentially in conflict with one another. The interpretations of the social good, achievement and the nature of love relations are all culturally mediated and historically determined. So the recognition-theoretical framework is universal, the detail of justice claims is relative to specific societies.

On Honneth's conception, this is not a problem because he conceives of justice mostly in terms of social integration. Means of social integration appeal to the normative self-understanding of members of a society where this self-understanding is culturally mediated and relative. In Honneth's view, it is a strength of his theory of justice that it speaks to the same norms and values that members of the society judge to be worthy of affirmation. These norms themselves are justified with reference to context-transcending, universal requirements for moral agency—that is, recognitive needs—which in turn also serve as the standard with reference to which appeals can be made, and the theory of justice can be expanded in terms of inclusivity and

individualisation as part of a moral learning process set in motion by recognition struggles. In fact, Honneth thinks that the concrete understanding or the actualisation of principles of justice is always relative to the historically determined, culturally mediated self-understanding of the members of a society. In order for the norm of participatory parity to be able to guide judgements and policies, we have to understand concretely what constitutes parity and what constitutes subordination. Fraser's theory thus must also have an element of specificity. Honneth, however, provides the standard by which we can decide what appropriate recognition consists of in a given society. He provides the guidelines of the debate in terms of those pre-theoretical normative expectations of individuals that after reflection are shown to actually pick out normative value—that is, recognition. The absence of recognition is experienced phenomenologically as moral injury and can also be shown conceptually to be a moral injury because it undermines moral agency.

#### 4.3.3.2. *Political Remedies*

There are other problems for Honneth's theory. Depending on the accuracy or lack thereof of his analysis of social injustice, the political remedies his theory suggests might be either ineffective or counterproductive. Fraser is specifically worried because she thinks that misunderstanding injustices as only cognitive and remedying them only by changing the practices of recognition might actually confound the issue by worsening the overlooked, redistributive dimension. Insofar as she thinks that Honneth fails to capture the economic dimension in his recognition theory, his remedies are bound to overlook it; they might happen to work, but that would be because by chance they might have the right kind of redistributive consequences. To a large degree, this objection hinges on the descriptive strength of Honneth's account. In the light of comments above, it is not obvious that Honneth's theory overlooks redistributive aspects of injustice. While his recognition theory cannot provide a recognition-theoretical account of all the mechanisms that operate in the economic sphere, it is well placed to identify all the moral injuries that can result from mechanisms, as well as identify strategies, policies and practices that can remedy those injuries. Furthermore, it is not clear that there is a concrete policy that can be justified on Fraser's framework but not on Honneth's and vice versa.

## 4.4. CONCLUSION

Honneth proposes a recognition-theoretical Critical Theory which combines a moral, a social and a political dimension. As a moral theory, he proposes a way in which to integrate ethics into morality—that is, he provides a normative space for emotions and for the appreciation of particularity at the same

time as grounding his theory in universal human vulnerabilities and requirements for moral agency. Moreover, because of the nature of misrecognition, a recognition-theoretical moral theory can also explain motivation (which strengthens its ability as social theory to explain social struggles). As a social theory, his recognition theory offers an analysis of the different social spheres which can explain social wrongs (for example, economic maldistribution) in terms of misrecognition. Moreover, Honneth's theory allows us to identify some social struggles and movements as emancipatory movements. As a political theory, he offers a recognition-theoretical account of justice, which, based on a notion of moral progress, can serve to adjudicate between conflicting recognition claims. While Honneth's recognition theory faces some problems in all dimensions, misrecognition remains a good way to understand moral harm and experiences of injustice which motivate struggles for recognition and thus explain sociopolitical changes. Misrecognition crosses the boundaries of psychological, social, political and moral theory. Moreover, it is not clear whether some of the issues raised actually point to weaknesses. For example, it is true that Honneth's theory depends on the status of specific empirical psychological theories. However, this is merely a consequence of a theory that derives a normative framework from lived reality—a theory with the kind of practical ambitions that Critical Theory has must be empirically embedded. Similarly, problems regarding adjudicating between conflicting claims, or cases in which the different cognitive demands (e.g. love and respect) might be in tension, are a result partly of a Critical Theory that refrains from imposing a positive, concrete and hence restrictive vision of an emancipated society. A theory which is aware of its own epistemic limits (when it comes to the image of a future emancipated society) must refrain from imposing substantial (rather than formal) conceptions of the good and thus must accept that judgements about the legitimacy of recognition claims are contestable and provisional. Disagreements about the interpretation and application of, as well as tensions between, the different expressions of the recognition principle seem to be consistent with the historical narrative that forms part of the theory, as well as able to explain social reality. It seems that the recognition-theoretical account of justice is robust enough to give some guidance for debate. It cannot forgo debate and judge conflicts a priori.

Before coming to a more critical assessment, it remains to be seen how recognition theory works as a tool for analysing social pathologies and as a framework for a critique of capitalism (in chapters 5 and 6).

## NOTES

1. The relationship between Critical Theory and social movements is not straightforward. Honneth goes to some length to show that Critical Theory must not be derived from new social

movements. These movements express those criticisms that have already been successfully articulated and have managed to mobilise people and grab public attention. Critical Theory, however, must be able to locate and address those injustices and social wrongs that have not (yet) been successfully articulated, that might operate below the radar even of those affected. However, Critical Theory must be able to explain and, where appropriate, justify social movements in order to maintain rootedness in lived reality and practical relevance.

2. See Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?* (RoR).
3. I follow Honneth and others by adopting a distinction between ethics and morality, where ethics is an Aristotelian conception which centres on notions of the good life. Because ethics is usually concerned with (more or less) comprehensive conceptions of the good, it usually contains an element of cultural relativism or secularism. Morality, by contrast, is understood in Kantian terms as concerned with universal norms and the questions of right.
4. Honneth, “Between Aristotle and Kant”, 133.
5. RoR, 131–34.
6. See, for example, Honneth, “Between Aristotle and Kant”, 139.
7. See also Deranty, *Beyond Communication*.
8. I understand, for example, Honneth’s remarks in RoR, 257, in this way.
9. See, for example, Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom* (2010, original German text published in 2001).
10. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 103–5.
11. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 108–9.
12. One of the reasons why Habermas rejects those forms of cosmopolitanism in which the global community is not politically organised (and mediated) through smaller communities is the necessity of a type of solidarity which is able to motivate people to work for others and sometimes forgo personal advantage for the benefit of others. The type of solidarity that “binds” members of a moral community is too abstract to possess this motivating force. Habermas, *Die postnationale Konstellation*; Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity*.
13. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 112.
14. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 112.
15. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 111.
16. Honneth also rejects various approaches to “love” in the philosophy of emotions because they overrationalise the emotion.
17. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 116.
18. Honneth, “The Other of Justice”, 121.
19. Two remarks here: First, Honneth accepts an idea that we find also in Adorno (and in a different form in Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*) that we can appreciate radical particularity only emotionally. That which we grasp rationally is already always generalised. However, that type of “generalised” or moderate particularity also finds its space in the social dimension of Honneth’s recognition theory. When we esteem individuals for their contribution to the social good, we understand an individual aspect in terms of the general. This also reflects the Hegelian intuition that the capitalist market exchange forces individuals to formulate their particular desire in general terms. Second, it is Honneth’s advance over Derrida to find a moral theory in which the perspectives are not incompatible and changes between perspectives can be justified from both perspectives, and it is an advance over Habermas that Honneth makes room for deep affectivity and radical particularity.
20. See Deranty, *Beyond Communication*.
21. In RoR, Honneth explicitly identifies self-realisation, rather than autonomy, as normatively grounding for his recognition theory, which invites Fraser to formulate one of her objections in terms of Aristotelian self-realisation; however, Honneth’s conception is different (and in some ways more sophisticated), combining Aristotelian elements with Kantian elements, as we will see below.
22. See Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”, for similar narrative.
23. RoR and *Freedom’s Right*.
24. See also Deranty, *Beyond Communication*.
25. See, for example, “Between Justice and Affection”, 157.
26. See RoR, 161–68.

27. RoR, 161–68; see also 150–51.

28. Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*. See also Thompson, “Participatory Parity and Self-Realization”, for ways of combining Fraser’s and Honneth’s theory.

29. RoR, 183.

30. See, for example, “Between Aristotle and Kant”, 133–39.

31. RoR, 238.

32. RoR, 11–16.

33. RoR, 13.

34. RoR, 48.

35. RoR, 13.

36. Apart from Honneth, Charles Taylor, who is another Hegelian, would be the target of Fraser’s critique.

37. RoR, 16–26.

38. RoR, 17.

39. RoR, 18.

40. For example, “race” is two-dimensional, as it plays a role in the structure, division and valuation of labour (mainly menial and non-menial labour, RoR, 22) as well as being subject to “Eurocentric patterns of cultural value privilege” (RoR, 23). Racism is an economic and redistributive injustice, as it undermines parity through status subordination and economic exploitation. Similarly “gender” plays a role in the structure, division and valuation of labour (traditionally, according to the binary gender division, gender is reflected in and co-determinant of the distinction between mainly paid and paid or productive and reproductive labour) and is subject to cis-masculine, heterosexist “patterns of cultural value privilege”.

41. RoR, 83–86.

42. RoR, 43–44, 93.

43. See Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*, 123–24.

44. See RoR, for example, 150–57.

45. See, for example, Honneth and Hartmann, “Paradoxes of Capitalist Modernization”, 170; see also Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*.

46. RoR, 35.

47. RoR, 249.

48. For example, Zurn cites Honneth’s assertion in RoR (153–54) that “evaluative schemas” determine the nature and (relative) remuneration of work as contradicting the more modest remarks Honneth makes in his later reply (RoR, 248–49). See Zurn, *Axel Honneth*, 140. However, in the earlier passage, Honneth points out that the nature of what constitutes productive work and the specifications of what constitutes one type of work in the division of labour are not determined technically but are socially fixed. Further, the social construction of division of labour must follow some deep-seated cultural evaluative patterns. This seems still a way off from claiming that these evaluative patterns are the sole determining mechanisms.

49. Zurn, *Axel Honneth*; Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*, 113.

50. While Honneth must maintain a link to social reality, on the descriptive level it is sufficient that he accurately tracks deep-seated normative (cognitive) expectations and their violation. In fact, one way of understanding Honneth here is in terms of an attempt to reconstruct the deep-seated, normative convictions that guide members of a society and that shape the expectations they have of their institutions (and thus constitute the conditions of ongoing participation in those institutions and hence of social reproduction).

51. There are various ways in which the labour paradigm does not match the kind of work involved in raising children. Among other things, Rössler mentions the impossibility of contractually fixing working hours to eight hours per day, five days a week with paid sick leave and annual leave. Nor can this kind of affective, private pay work be turned into shift work. There is a difference between the affective care work towards dependents one is in relations of love with and the profession of nursing. Rössler, “Work, Recognition, Emancipation”, 142–44.

52. See, for example, Honneth’s “Rejoinder” in *Recognition and Power*, esp. 358–59; Honneth, “Between Justice and Affection”; Honneth, “Love and Morality”.

53. Young, “Recognition of Love’s Labor”, esp. 199–206.

54. Honneth, “Rejoinder” in *Recognition and Power*, 362.

55. Young, “Recognition of Love’s Labor”, esp. 206–211. In this respect, Young’s point is similar to Rössler’s and she cites the deterioration of care in those cases of “commodification of care work” in which children’s homes and nursing homes are run for profit as examples of the incompatibility between the capitalist understanding of “achievement” and esteem for good care (209).

56. McNay, “Social Freedom and Progress in the Family”, 176–77.

57. McNay, “The Trouble with Recognition”, 277; McNay, *Against Recognition*, 145–46; RoR, 219.

58. McNay, “Social Freedom and Progress in the Family”, 176.

59. McNay, “Social Freedom and Progress in the Family”, 179.

60. Honneth, “Organised Self-Realization”.

61. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 145–46.

62. For McNay, the idealisation is worsened when coupled with a commitment to the inevitability of progress, which means that Honneth now underestimates the radical and contentious nature of those political measures necessary to address power asymmetries. While Honneth’s notion of progress will be discussed in detail below, I just want to point out that it would be very anti-Honnethian if Honneth’s commitment to progress meant that political action was no longer necessary. That is not the type of commitment he envisages. Honneth does allow for ruptures, and any progress is the result of struggles that sometimes are not won.

63. See, for example, Honneth, “Facets of the Presocial Self”, esp. 226–29.

64. The point is similar to the critical comments about the consequences of Honneth’s account of the mother-infant relation for feminism in Johanna Meehan, “Recognition and the Dynamics of Intersubjectivity”. However, unlike her, I am not so much concerned with the conception of the infants’ development, which Honneth has modified, but really just with the fact that his description evokes and mentally revives images of femininity, female attributes and the very naturalistic thinking Honneth explicitly rejects.

65. One might add that one of the main theories Honneth draws on, object-relations theory, is one theory among many and it is contested both because it is a psychoanalytic approach and as a psychoanalytic approach.

66. RoR, 31.

67. Honneth is able to recognise the violation of the recognition principle that occurs when, for example, nurses do not earn high enough wages to afford accommodation.

68. I take this objection to be implicit in Fraser’s emphasis of the “publicly verifiable” nature of injustice on her paradigm as opposed to recognition paradigms. RoR, 31.

69. RoR, 118–22.

70. Honneth’s charge against Fraser itself, however, seems not to stand up to scrutiny either. While the reflexive moment in Fraser’s account makes it difficult to spell out highly specified standards of participatory parity (and hence of what constitutes status subordination), she does not depend on social movements the way Honneth describes. In fact, the reflexive moment, the idea that the criteria themselves have to be settled in debate and thus are always contestable (as long as participatory parity has not been achieved) and thus provisional, means that she does not have to regard them as social movements to always be justified or to have identified all injustices. What might be a problem for Fraser is that her emphasis on participatory parity, presumably parity in public deliberations (she does not specify, which Zurn identifies as a weakness), moves her theory so close to Habermas’s ideal that she also unduly excludes oppressed classes (though the idea of both cultural prejudices and maldistribution, which would include access to education, go some way to warrant against that charge).

71. RoR, 37–38.

72. RoR, 222–28.

73. This line of argument means that those who reject equal autonomy will not be convinced of the normative standing of his theory of recognition, which puts Honneth in much the same position as Fraser. While exclusion might always be problematic, it is not a specific problem for Honneth.

## *Chapter Five*

# Recognition and Social Pathologies

Critical social theory is concerned with exposing and combating injustices as well as with the diagnosis and cure of “social pathologies”. The idea of social pathologies seems important in order to be able to capture “social wrongs”—for example, social practices and institutional setups which prevent emancipation but are not captured by the idea of “injustice”. Moreover, the diagnosis and exposure of “social pathologies” constitute an explanation of why individuals engage in practices that are wrong. This explanatory dimension is a distinctive feature of the kind of social philosophy Honneth is concerned with. As we saw earlier, the explanatory aspect is closely connected to *praxis*, since the idea is that once subjects understand the mechanisms that “dupe them” into compliance, they are motivated to resist. In that way the diagnostic work of Critical Theory also constitutes part of the therapeutic work. The concept and role of social pathology is thus essential to Critical Theory.

Especially in the last few years, interest in “social pathology” as a category of social philosophy has been revived. To some extent, this revival is probably due to a recognition-theoretical use of the notion in both Honneth and Charles Taylor.<sup>1</sup> Consequently there is now an extremely rich literature on social pathology in general and Honneth’s recognition-theoretical approach in particular.<sup>2</sup> In order to bring clarity to the conversation about social pathology, various typologies have been proposed. While Christopher F. Zurn proposes one structure to capture all (sub-)types of social pathology, Arto Laitinen and Arvi Särkelä propose four distinct types of social pathology, of which Zurn’s and variations of Zurn’s account is but one type.<sup>3</sup> These taxonomies are very valuable for the field as such and they will figure in a later section of this chapter where I will discuss the question of the unity of Honneth’s account.

Honneth's work on social pathology is varied, and this diversity strikes me as one of its strong points. While there is clearly development in his position, it would be a loss to read the later position as replacing the earlier ones. Throughout his work, Honneth shows how recognition theory can respond to social situations and identify social pathologies that are as varied as oppressive social phenomena in advanced modernity are. The account is thus driven by social reality.

In line with his understanding of social philosophy and his reading of the projects of Rousseau and Hegel, Honneth's recognition theory is intended to explain injustice and also to help diagnose and understand social pathologies. The explanatory role of recognition for the diagnosis and “cure” of social pathologies is a distinct feature of his account. In this chapter, I will discuss Honneth's conception of social pathology. The first sections will present Honneth's general conception of social pathologies in the context of that of his predecessors in the Frankfurt School generally. In the second section, I will introduce a selection of the particular social pathologies Honneth diagnoses. In that section, it will become obvious that Honneth is well placed to diagnose social pathologies in such a way that the diagnoses themselves present powerful social critiques of pervasive social practices and structural deficits. Moreover, they also point towards possible emancipatory transformation. I will then focus on problems with Honneth's recent proposal and the lack of unity in his approach. In the last section, I will address the relationship between the social pathology and the justice framework.

### 5.1. SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES IN CRITICAL THEORY

As we have seen in the first two chapters, social pathologies are an intrinsic and important part of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and of social philosophy as Honneth understands it. The focus on or at least inclusion of phenomena that inhibit emancipation but do not constitute a form of injustice is distinctive and contributes to the value of the approach—it provides an extra perspective on mechanisms of domination. Moreover, as mentioned above, the diagnosis of social pathology provides a narrative to explain the (willing) complicity of subjects in practices that undermine their own emancipation or self-realisation.<sup>4</sup> This narrative can have explanatory and practical relevance because it can enhance our understanding of oppressive mechanisms as well as motivate social transformation. If we recognise our own actions in those narratives as well as the “true nature” of the “pathological practices” we participate in, we might be better equipped and more willing to change. “Social pathology”, then, tries to pick out the mechanisms by which individuals willingly partake in their own oppression. This also requires an explanation of why some “social wrongs” are accompanied by silence or lack of

awareness.<sup>5</sup> I use the very generic “social wrong” to capture a variety of social structures and practices that prevent individuals in society from being able to self-realise. Honneth distinguishes between social pathologies and injustice.<sup>6</sup> In cases of injustice we generally hold the perpetrators accountable because we ascribe intention, whereas agents do not intentionally engage in pathological behaviour or misdevelopments.<sup>7</sup> More generally, we might distinguish between a justice framework and a pathology paradigm. Talk of social pathologies allows us to judge certain practices to be wrong, and hence normative failures, without thereby blaming the participants. Moreover, social pathologies might address practices and institutional dynamics that are beyond the scope of a justice framework. In other words, some of the practices diagnosed are not plausibly regarded as injustices, as we will see in the next section. We will discuss the relation between the justice framework and the pathology paradigm in more detail in the last section.

The diagnosis and exposure of “social pathologies” is essential to Critical Theory as praxis for epistemic and therapeutic reasons. It increases knowledge and can be part of the cure if it motivates cognitive transformations. Diagnosis might be able to stimulate cognitive transformation if the specific pathology is a cognitive failure—for example, if the pathological praxis in question “distracts one’s attention from the very social conditions that structurally produce the system”, where this system is one of domination.<sup>8</sup> Once this praxis is exposed, attention is focused on the system of domination. By exposing the mechanisms employed to hide oppression the Critical Theorist clears the path to emancipation. Inasmuch as social wrongs seem to be going on below the threshold of awareness of members of society, it is necessary first to convince individuals that wrongs are happening. This importantly involves persuading individuals that they can be blind to certain oppressive mechanisms. In other words, if subjects are kept unaware of a social wrong because by being systematically blinded to it (for example, through pervasive and persistent implicit biases), the critic needs to do more than point to the observable facts of the matter (for example, systematic discrimination); she also needs to expose the implicit bias. Similarly, social wrongs, such as rampant inequality, might register but seem to be inevitable, regrettable but unchangeable (and hence not due to pathological practices). Here the critic needs to expose the changeable nature of oppressive structures as well as offer a plausible explanation as to why subjects are blinded to the “true nature” of those structures.<sup>9</sup> To this end, the traditional task of ideology critique is to expose the reasons why individuals assume that society is necessarily the way it is, as well to expose the nature of society as contingently the way it is.

According to Honneth, the previous Frankfurt School generations—specifically, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas—understand social

pathology in terms of a “deformation of social rationality” such that “the process of the actualization of reason” is “interrupt[ed] or distort[ed]”.<sup>10</sup> The rationality that is affected by pathology is the very rationality that would lead to an emancipated society and that is stirred through “critical enlightenment”. It is that which is “awakened” through exposure to Critical Theory. In Habermas, for example, pathology is understood as a distortion of communicative rationality. Communicative rationality is emancipatory. Consequently, exposing the pathology is a way of freeing the emancipatory (aspects of) rationality. We have seen in chapter 1 that the concept of rationality is fundamental to the Frankfurt School and that different theorists employ different conceptions. Honneth employs a broad and therefore unifying conception of social rationality. Social rationality aims at the “rational universal”. Honneth traces this notion of rationality, as well as the associated notion of a social pathology, back to Hegel. The “rational universal” refers to the idea that we need to realise that only those social structures are rational in which all members can self-realise or be free.<sup>11</sup> In Hegel, failing to recognise that our self-realisation and freedom consists in our relations with others in a rationally structured state leads to suffering and is pathological. Such failures manifest in a lack of determination, because in denying our dependence on others we fail to regard projects with others (or duties that stem from our specific relation to others) as binding, or they may (also) manifest as mistrust and antagonism towards others (including institutions) who are misperceived as obstacles to freedom rather than as a condition of freedom and hence as co-constitutive of freedom. Hegel thinks that it is the task of philosophy to explain and show how certain social structures, institutions and practices constitute freedom—and thus to reconcile individuals with those aspects of the state or community. The pathology is explained in terms of irrationality. For Hegel, then, the world is rational and the pathology consists in individuals’ failure to recognise the world as such. For Marx, and the left-Hegelianism of the Frankfurt School, things are the other way around. Social reality, with its meaningless suffering, is irrational, and to be reconciled with it, to regard it as rational or as necessary, is pathological. For these left-Hegelians, the pathological irrationality consists in seeing the world as either necessarily the way it is or the best way it could be, and to thus accept the status quo. Given that social structures are human made, contingent and, hence, changeable, such acceptance is irrational from the standpoint of self-realisation. Self-realisation, or emancipation, demands social transformation. It demands that the social world be made into a rational order.<sup>12</sup>

As we will see, while Honneth incorporates the left-Hegelian view of social pathology, he holds that the focus on “deformations of reason” is overly narrow. His various diagnoses allow for a broader understanding of social pathology, one that includes reflexive and cognitive pathologies.

## 5.2. SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES IN HONNETH

Since the idea of “social pathologies” is central to Frankfurt School Critical Theory and to social philosophy, it is unsurprising that we can find a rich literature on social pathology in Honneth. I will first present Honneth’s more general considerations about social health and illness before turning to a discussion of a selection of his concrete diagnoses.

### 5.2.1. Standards for Health and Illness

Honneth holds that a diagnosis of pathology requires a standard of “health” against which to judge a process as pathological. As we saw in chapter 2, Honneth distinguishes different methods to derive a standard of “social health” or “healthy society”. The historical method reconstructs an idea of a good society with reference to history, building on a specific philosophy of history. Here we can consider some practice or institutions pathological with reference to a (hypothetical) past or judge our present society from the perspective of a projected, emancipated future.<sup>13</sup> We know that Honneth rejects both past-based and future-based methods because ultimately, in constructing the “historical stance”, they already need to import a conception of the good society. This conception is then, however, not further justified.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, we can base our notion of the good life on philosophical anthropology. We can appropriate psychological (or psychoanalytical) insights into human needs and desires and the structure of the human psyche in order to come to a conception of human nature and fundamental human needs. Honneth prefers this second approach and, as we have seen, argues that all human beings need specific forms of recognition in order to form the kind of self-relations that are necessary for self-realisation.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, he understands social pathology ultimately in terms of misrecognition, including social practices, institutions, dynamics or structures that fail to enable recognition.

### 5.2.2. Misrecognition as Pathology

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth indicates a recognition-theoretical account of social pathologies. Honneth justifies his use of the pathology framework by pointing to linguistic habits and structural similarities. He claims that the fact that we are in the habit of talking about some forms of disrespect in medical terms, describing some practices of social humiliation as “social death” or as “injuries”, points to a likeness between disrespect and illness.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this way of talking about disrespect is justified if we look at the structure of disrespect and its effects on individuals. Much like organic infections which threaten the survival or integrity of the organism,

disrespect “endangers the identity of human beings”.<sup>17</sup> We can think of misrecognition or the denial of recognition as requiring diagnosis and cure. Humiliation and other violations of recognition along any of the three spheres can come with symptoms which Honneth describes as “negative emotional reactions expressed in feelings of social shame”.<sup>18</sup> These symptoms allow individuals to “come to realize that [they are] being illegitimately denied social recognition”,<sup>19</sup> and, as mentioned in chapter 3, they also serve as an “affective motivational basis”<sup>20</sup> to engage in struggles for recognition.

Such pathologies of recognition can be “cured” or prevented through provision and protection of “those relations of recognition that are able to protect subjects most extensively from suffering disrespect”.<sup>21</sup> Further, like physical infections, if left untreated, pathologies of recognition fester and spread. The view of social pathology Honneth sketches here sits comfortably with his critique of the conceptions of social pathology of his predecessors as exclusively pathologies of reason. Humiliation and other forms of failed recognition cannot be reduced just to failures of rationality.

We can see that this account is in line with Honneth’s conception of the task of social philosophy. It allows us to make objective, normative judgments about social wrongs beyond injustices. In other words, it picks out as wrongs practices about which individuals are not able to make justice claims and for which we might not want to blame individuals. Moreover, pathologies of recognition provide an insight into what healthy social life should (not) look like.

### 5.2.3. Reification

From these more general remarks and early reflections, I will now turn to a selection of diagnoses Honneth offers. Honneth’s appropriation of “reification” as a social pathology of our time in our (Western) society is a good example of a cognitive social pathology.

Honneth’s account of “reification” is influenced by Lukács, who coined the term. However, in contrast to Lukács, Honneth does not equate reification with objectification. Rather, Honneth thinks that under some conditions, objectification can be necessary and “healthy”. Moreover, Honneth, as opposed to Lukács, thinks that individuals do not intentionally engage in reification and are hence not morally blameworthy. In the “Berkeley Tanner Lectures”, later published as *Reification*, Honneth distinguishes between three types of reification: reification of others, reification of the natural world and reification of self. Honneth explains the pathological praxis of reification through a notion of “healthy” recognitive praxis. Drawing on Lukács, Heidegger, Dewey, Cavell and developmental psychologists (mainly Hobson and Tomasello), Honneth claims both a genetic and a conceptual priority of a

specific form of recognition—antecedent recognition—over (objectifying) cognition.<sup>22</sup>

Antecedent recognition (or the antecedent stance of recognition) refers to a practical, affective involvement with the world—a form of “care” or “empathy” that characterizes our fundamental orientation in the world. Without such an affective stance we could never develop an understanding of the world (cognition) or meaningfully pursue projects in the world.<sup>23</sup> Honneth establishes the genetic priority of antecedent recognition with the help of theories in developmental psychology. Tomasello and Hobson show that learning requires taking another’s perspective. Infants learn to orient themselves in the world, to distinguish between objects and subjects and to understand intentions and desires only through taking another’s perspective. Perspective taking, however, is only possible if the infant has a positive emotional relation to this other.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the genesis of cognition requires positive emotional attachment to others or a form of antecedent recognition.<sup>25</sup> Honneth complements the developmental with a conceptual argument: We do not fully grasp the world as it is disclosed to us through others unless we have an attitude of care towards others. Moreover, unless we have a cognitive stance, unless we are affectively engaged with the world, the very practices we are engaged in lose meaning for us.<sup>26</sup> Having thus established the genetic and conceptual priority of antecedent recognition, Honneth introduces reification as a form of objectification combined with a “forgetting” of our original cognitive stance.

When we reify others, we see them as “objects” or “types”, possibly in terms of their function or along stereotypes—for example, as “rival”, “employee” or “refugee”—and forget our original stance of care towards them. Forgetting, rather than the objectification, constitutes the pathology.<sup>27</sup> Possible causes of forgetting are “one-dimensional practices”, which reduce others to objects of assessment or observation or a commitment to a worldview that regards others in terms of stereotypes (e.g. racism) or a combination of both.<sup>28</sup>

Reification of the non-human natural world is an indirect form of reification only. What we forget is the meaning the non-human world has for other human beings. The relation between reification of others and reification of the non-human world remains unclear. Honneth’s position here might appear disappointing since he gives up on the chance to mount an environmentalist critique of capitalism. We might think, along with environmental feminists and some Marxist feminists, that it is a particular, pathological, feature of capitalism to regard the non-human world only or mostly in terms of profit maximisation. Practices that use the environment to maximise profit tend to cause irreversible damage. Honneth seems to have difficulties linking the influence of commodity thinking on our attitudes towards the environment to environmental issues. Moreover, and possibly connected to the above, he has

difficulties establishing anything more than mere instrumental value of the non-human natural world. However, Honneth can formulate a critique of exploitative use of resources and other environmental practices based on the instrumental value the non-human environment has for other humans. He is thus not doomed to silence when it comes to questions of environmental policies and practices. Moreover, even though Honneth himself does not pursue this possibility, it seems plausible to think that when it comes to non-human animals, it might be possible to extend relations of mutual recognition and thus to formulate a recognition-theoretical account of our relations to and treatment of some non-human animals.<sup>29</sup>

Self-reification is the third type Honneth discusses. Self-reification is best understood when we contrast it with appropriate or healthy self-relation. The issue here is our fundamental attitude to our “inner experience”, our “subjectivity”.<sup>30</sup> In order to appreciate Honneth’s idea of healthy self-relation it makes sense to recall Honneth’s conception of the self, as, for example, articulated in “Decentred Autonomy”. As we saw in chapter 3, the self is conceived of as only partially self-transparent. Unconscious aspects (the “I”) of the self disrupt our day-to-day pursuits (projects of the “me”). An autonomous agent must find a way to self-disclose those unconscious aspects and to integrate them into their conscious, ethically self-reflective conception of themselves. Such self-disclosure requires that various conditions are fulfilled, ranging from the availability of linguistic tools to relations of mutual care with others who assist our self-disclosure and reflective integration in several ways. Moreover, and relevant for the idea of self-reification and proper self-relation, self-disclosure also requires that we take up a stance of care towards ourselves, such that we think that the various needs and desires are worthy articulation. In the framework of reification, this stance is a stance of antecedent recognition. Furthermore, integration of various aspects means that we should see ourselves neither as an object that need only be discovered nor as the object of creation of our conscious will. Rather, we have to appreciate that parts of our subjectivity are given but need to be actively disclosed and integrated.

Honneth’s account has met with various criticisms and I cannot possibly do justice to all of the points raised here. Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss and Jonathan Lear all voice concerns about an apparently overly optimistic view of the nature of “antecedent recognition” as positive affective relation.<sup>31</sup> They claim that this leads Honneth to suggest an overly optimistic view of our fundamental way of relating to the world, one in which we always positively care. To some extent, Honneth is able to reply to these objections by pointing to the difference between antecedent and normative recognition. Antecedent recognition can be constituted by negative emotions, he claims.<sup>32</sup> While one might question terminology here—that is, equating antecedent recognition with “care” (albeit the Heideggerian conception), which has pos-

itive connotations—there is a different problem. It is not clear that Honneth is consistent in his use of “antecedent recognition”. Honneth’s argument for the ontogenetic priority of antecedent recognition, for example, is partly based on theories in developmental psychology that suggest the need of infants to have positive relationships with their primary caregivers in order to be able to take up a cognitive stance in the world. Similarly, when Honneth talks about self-reification, the adequate stance we should have towards ourselves must be positive. The fact that he needs to use “antecedent recognition” in a more restrictive sense in this case might suggest that self-reification differs from other-reification.

#### 5.2.4. Ideological Recognition and Organised Self-Realisation

Apart from his recognitive conception of reification, Honneth also diagnoses other forms of pathological misrecognition. What Honneth calls “ideological recognition” and “organised self-realisation” are parts of a group of pathologies that can be understood as “paradoxes of individualisation”. In his account of “ideological recognition”, Honneth acknowledges and responds to the problematic, dominating, aspects of recognition highlighted by critics such as Lois McNay, but also by Judith Butler, Paddy McQueen and others.<sup>33</sup> McNay, for example, claims that Honneth presents “recognition” in an idealised way. She explains this idealisation of recognition with reference to Honneth’s normative needs. Because Honneth wants to be able to ascribe normative value to recognition, he underplays the degree to which recognition is—as a matter of fact—at least as much a tool of domination as it is of emancipation. In other words, McNay holds that Honneth’s normative needs determine his descriptive account of recognition as domination free.<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, Butler points out that while recognition is essential for subject formation, it always involves recognition along social standards, which make—that is, create and shape—and at the same time “undo” the individual.<sup>35</sup> We will return to these criticisms in chapter 8. While Honneth does not reply directly to this charge, he acknowledges that recognition can be a tool for domination, but he thinks that it is possible to clearly distinguish between oppressive forms of recognition and the normatively valuable, emancipating forms of proper recognition.<sup>36</sup> To this end, Honneth introduces “normalising recognition” and “ideological recognition” as pathological forms of recognition employed for oppressive purposes. It is important for both the analysis of pathological social practices and the emancipatory value of recognition proper that Honneth can offer a reliable way to distinguish normatively valuable recognition from normalising and ideological recognition.

In his essay “Recognition as Ideology”, Honneth wants to establish this clear distinction between “unambiguously positive” recognition and ideological recognition.<sup>37</sup> Recognition proper is an act or “stance” towards another

individual or group which intentionally expresses or constitutes an “affirmation of positive qualities”.<sup>38</sup> Recognition can be expressed in different ways, depending on the kind of quality that is affirmed (e.g. legal respect affirms autonomy and equality, whereas esteem affirms unique skills and aspects, and love affirms needs). Individuals and institutions can recognize individuals and groups.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, recognition proper is not merely expressed symbolically but always expressed in changes to the material conditions.<sup>40</sup> Examples of such material changes are legal reforms to protect individuals or groups or policies of economic redistribution. Further, Honneth holds that recognition responds to perceived value in an individual or group, rather than constructing or attributing value.<sup>41</sup> Values develop throughout history in line with increasing knowledge about how to achieve the formally conceived aim of allowing all members of a society to freely self-realise.

In contrast to the emancipatory power of recognition proper, “normalising recognition” and “ideological recognition” prevent emancipation in different ways. Normalising recognition impedes emancipation by maintaining the status quo or even regressing to a more repressive stage. It does so by encouraging behaviours and attitudes that perpetuate oppression, for example, by “praising” submissive attitudes of wives towards their husbands. Honneth claims that “normalising recognition” does not pose a huge challenge in terms of theoretically distinguishing it from proper recognition because it “recognises” individuals for acting in accordance with norms and values which are (generally) no longer socially accepted, which fall behind a social developmental stage. According to Honneth, our social knowledge about conditions for an emancipated society has increased such that we recognize those normalising “values” as repressive or restrictive rather than as aiding self-realisation. For example, subjects gendered as women might be praised for being exceptionally good at housework. However, because recognition here has to refer to a vocabulary of value that we no longer accept as valuable, it is not to be confused with proper recognition.<sup>42</sup> Honneth’s position here seems problematic. He seems to overestimate the degree to which we (generally) agree on what values are regressive. It seems plausible to think that quite a significant number of individuals believe that, for example, these traditional patriarchal norms are actually valuable.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, and as we will discuss in more detail in chapter 8, because he focuses on the theoretical distinction, Honneth seems to underestimate the practical force and pervasiveness of this kind of recognition, which might be involved in the “regressive” movements some observe today.<sup>44</sup> In other words, it might be that even though agents theoretically recognise “subservience to husbands” or “good housewifeship” as regressive norms, we still gain self-esteem from being recognised for fulfilling these norms if, for example, this is the only kind of recognition available to us. Insofar as normalising recognition manages to practically encourage individuals to engage in oppressive practices and thus

presents a means for individuals to gain self-esteem, Honneth has a problem. If normalising recognition allows individuals to achieve self-esteem, it seems to be morally as valuable as recognition proper, especially if only normalising recognition is available.<sup>45</sup>

In ideological recognition, as opposed to normalising recognition, individuals are recognised with reference to the normative vocabulary they accept as valuable. In fact, it is crucial that individuals or groups accept ideological recognition as genuinely affirming a valuable quality. This affirmation must be credible because only then can ideological recognition serve its purpose.<sup>46</sup> Honneth claims that only credible affirmation of a genuinely valuable quality that the individual does possess can increase self-respect or self-esteem, thus causing individuals to willingly participate in and perpetuate practices that are ultimately detrimental to emancipation. Honneth suggests that ideological recognition should also be “contrastive”—that is, it should either pick out a new aspect or appeal to a new value. According to Honneth, this increases the degree to which individuals feel “distinguished”, and so it enhances the effect on self-esteem.<sup>47</sup> At this stage Honneth’s moderate value realism adds to the lure of ideological recognition. According to Honneth’s moderate value realism, while moral values are objective, they develop and change in history. Thus, moral progress is possible and moral progress might involve the discovery of new values or of new aspects of a personality that should be valued. Since genuine progress with new values is possible, it becomes harder to distinguish new (progressive) values from norms that only masquerade as new values. It thus becomes more difficult to distinguish ideological contrastive recognition from progressive recognition.

The strength of Honneth’s account of ideological recognition becomes obvious when we look closely at one of the examples he provides: introduction of the “entreployee” into the labour market. The “entreployee” is different from an employee because of increased flexibility. Entreployees own and manage their labour power themselves; they are supposedly in control of their own working hours and workload. They are recognised as being more independent, creative and more autonomous than mere employees, and they are supposedly part “entrepreneurs”. Affirmation is expressed with reference to values like “autonomy”, “freedom”, “creativity” and “self-determination”. These apparent positive evaluations can be accepted and internalised by individuals who thus willingly support social practices or institutional changes (e.g. legal reforms) which seem to increase autonomy but are actually to their detriment. Because the introduction of “entreployees” goes hand in hand with and justifies the deregulation of the labour market, entreployees lose much of the rights employees have (e.g. holiday pay, sick leave). The increased flexibility masks the pressure to accept increased workload at less pay.<sup>48</sup> For Honneth, what distinguishes ideological from proper recognition is this worsening of material conditions. The proper recognition of self-

management and flexibility as autonomy would have to also lead to changes in material conditions that either reflect increased respect or allow increased self-realisation.<sup>49</sup>

We can see why ideological recognition (or, better, the internalisation of ideological recognition) constitutes a pathology. We might even think it constitutes a pathology in terms of “deformed” or “impaired” rationality or blinded cognition. Subjects regard the practices and institutions they participate in as normatively valuable (they further autonomy and freedom, etc.) and are prevented from understanding them as oppressive or as blocking self-realisation (and hence as not properly promoting social values). However, distinguishing ideological from proper recognition might be more problematic than Honneth envisages. Ideological recognition also involves material changes. The material changes that accompany ideological recognition can be seen as allowing greater room for self-realisation because of greater flexibility. The standards of judgement here are contestable. We can see the problem especially in connection with organised self-realisation (below), which deems flexible work as a form of self-realisation. Overall, then, Honneth manages to explain a practice and our participation in it well but underestimates the practical difficulty of distinguishing such pathological practices from emancipatory practices.

Honneth also underplays the extent to which ideological recognition might be involved not merely in encouraging the participation of the employees but also in encouraging others to tolerate and even validate the practice. It might even be the case that the main achievement of ideological recognition is that it justifies oppressive structures in the eyes of those who impose those structures and of bystanders. This might explain why social wrongs cause no outrage. The problem is that this “abuse” of the nature of autonomy gains social “validity”, and so, socially, people might come to regard employees as more responsible for their own economic fate than they really are. This also means that individuals become less sympathetic to those who are less lucky. Possibly more worrying is that, over time, we might also come to regard autonomy and self-realisation in terms of increased flexibility and independence; in other words, we might lose the emancipatory meaning in the language of autonomy. This latter worry is closely related to the pathology Honneth describes as “organised self-realisation”.

### 5.2.5. Organised Self-Realisation

“Organised self-realisation” describes a pervasive feature of social reality which, according to Honneth, is an aberration of the widespread ideal of self-realisation. In organised self-realisation, the “Romantic ideal of authenticity”<sup>50</sup> has been accepted and transformed in various ways through advertisement, restructuring of the labour market and so on. “Self-realisation” has

been transformed from a concept that can justify a demand of individuals for better material conditions to a justification of a demand on individuals to present themselves as successfully self-realising in every aspect of their life. The pathology results from various social developments which Honneth (following Simmel) partly sums up under the heading of “new individualism”. Increases in available resources and leisure time, coupled with improvements in the accessibility of education and other cultural activities, means that individuals have more choices than before in terms of how to live their life. This leads to increased individualism. Additionally, the “Romantic ideal of authenticity” has now been widely accepted. Rather than demanding the possibility of making and living authentic life choices, there is now pressure on individuals to self-realise in all areas of life. This pressure, in turn, leads, on the one hand, to an increase in feelings of emptiness, depression, meaninglessness and superfluity; on the other hand, it justifies the deregulation of the labour market.

Organised self-realisation is pathological in two different ways. First, it is a source of actual psychological suffering. Individuals who suffer from meaninglessness or emptiness are not rationally impaired in the way they are affected in, for example, ideological recognition. Rather, in the case of organised self-realisation, individuals feel empty or meaningless either because they cannot even feign self-realisation, while feeling the constant pressure to do so, or because they are aware of the fact that they are only feigning it. Second, apart from the psychological suffering, organised self-realisation is also a source of “legitimising” and hence reproducing social processes or practices that are detrimental to emancipation (and hence self-realisation). Insofar as the deregulation of the labour market is detrimental to self-realisation but justified by appeal to self-realisation, it is a contradiction.<sup>51</sup>

### 5.2.6. Pathology as Disease of Society

In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth offers what might be interpreted as a new account of social pathology.<sup>52</sup> Here I want to focus on a specific shift in Honneth's account—namely, his move to disconnect social pathology from the experience of suffering (subjective suffering). In terms of the relation between individual and social pathology, Honneth now states explicitly that “such [social] pathologies certainly cannot be interpreted as a social accumulation of individual pathologies or psychological disorders”<sup>53</sup> and that “the symptoms typical of such social pathologies . . . do not appear in the form of conspicuous individual behaviour or character deformation”.<sup>54</sup>

Honneth expands on this disconnect in “The Diseases of Society”. Here Honneth defines social pathology as a failure on the level of the interplay of different institutional spheres, which leads to restriction of the possibility of the spheres to “develop successfully”.<sup>55</sup> Further, Honneth holds that we can

only understand those social pathologies as pathologies (as “illnesses”) if we commit to an analogy between society and organism such that societies, like organisms, are teleologically structured so that all sub-systems contribute to achieving the goal of the organism. Presumably, the goal of organisms is survival, and it seems that Honneth also holds that the goal of society is survival (in the form of maintenance of social order or social reproduction). The different institutional spheres, with their different tasks, are determined by the need for society’s survival. Honneth distinguishes three overall tasks: control over external nature, control over internal nature and the regulation of social interaction.<sup>56</sup> Honneth thus locates social pathology neither at the level of individual suffering nor at the level of society as a collective subject but at the level of society as the functional interplay of institutions. It is important to point out that a healthy interplay of institutions does not necessarily maintain status quo, as that could be in itself pathological. Rather, the healthy interplay of institutions enables the necessary relations of recognition in each sphere. His ontological vagueness has rightly been criticised here, and for reasons of space I will not enter into the ontological debate.<sup>57</sup> While I will briefly return to the question of Honneth’s naturalist turn in the next section, the remainder of this section will focus on the relation between social pathology and individual suffering.

Honneth is aware of the fact that contemporary writers often think of social pathology as being constituted by a sufficient number of members of a society suffering from particular illnesses (often psychological illnesses). For example, if a sufficiently high number of individuals suffer from depression or burnout, this could be regarded as a “social pathology”. Honneth rejects this conception of social pathology, insisting that there must be something more to social pathology than aggregate individual suffering. He also rejects the idea that social pathologies must somehow manifest themselves in the subjective suffering of individuals. On such accounts, the social pathology itself might be located at the level of institutional arrangement, social practices or customs or norms, but they are pathological at least in part because they cause individuals to suffer from illnesses so that individuals seek professional help. The psychological suffering is then (increasingly) diagnosed by clinicians. These pathologies are social because they are caused on the level of social arrangements and pathological because they cause suffering of individuals, which in turn might threaten the “willingness” of individuals to maintain the social order (so they are a threat to the well-being of individuals and the survival of a society).

Honneth rejects this weaker link to individual suffering on three counts: First, with reference to Hannah Arendt and Emile Durkheim, Honneth claims that we might identify forms of “alienation” as social pathologies “that seem to have no influence on individuals’ perception of private health and that as such cannot have been reflected in the therapeutic findings of physi-

cians”<sup>58</sup>—for example, egocentricity or a retreat into the private (or even forms of reification). Second, Honneth claims that there is a double-disconnect; not only does social pathology not necessarily translate into or cause (clinical) suffering, but a widespread increase in diagnosed clinical pathologies (e.g. depression) or a widespread feeling of being psychologically ill is not an indication of social pathology. Increased self-reporting might be due to some sort of reward system, where those perceived as suffering from pathologies “[gain] social distinction”.<sup>59</sup> Third, increased numbers of diagnoses might be due to diagnostic trends. While the former point seems problematic, since there seems to be something pathological about social practices that give recognition or even esteem on the basis of being ill, there is historical evidence for the distorting effect of “diagnostic trends”. Honneth himself mentions trends to diagnose “narcissism, borderline personality disorder, depression, burnout, and so on”.<sup>60</sup>

In the context of Honneth’s disconnect, we might cast a glance back at the first generation: Adorno and Horkheimer understand social pathology in terms of “impaired rationality”. While Horkheimer suggests, in “Traditional and Critical Theory”, that individuals might be aware of contradictions in society which deem the current social order irrational—for example, agents might be aware of the tension between their freedom and society appearing as externally given (and restricting)—he mostly holds that rational impairment and deformations of reason take place behind individuals’ backs.

Two mechanisms are at work to keep pathology hidden and avoid the experience of subjective suffering: ideology and “regression”. Ideology presents processes or states of affairs as naturally or inevitably (necessarily) the way they are, as “second nature”. In this way, ideology blocks individuals from understanding their social world as socially constructed and, hence, open to change. The various forms of “regression”, caused and perpetuated to a large extent by the “culture industry” and through consumption of cultural products, numb individuals’ sensuality (including their capacity to feel suffering) as well as their intellect. Generally, we might think that the culture industry’s role in domination is to prevent subjects from experiencing pathology or from subjective suffering.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Marcuse claims that in late capitalism people happily participate in their own oppression.<sup>62</sup> Partly because individuals are blind to the pathological nature of the social processes and institutions they participate in, “therapeutic critique” requires “shock techniques” to motivate shifts in perception that open up a space also for subjective suffering. We might think that Honneth’s disconnect has a good pedigree and, more important, is appropriate because it seems plausible to think that a significant number of individuals participate in pathological practices without negative emotional reactions or even diffuse feelings that something is wrong. This is not to claim that it is not also the case that an equally significant number of people react to social pathologies emotionally. The

disconnect means that there might be social pathologies even where people seem content and happy, which might help to explain silence accompanying social wrongs as well as some of the resistance to social critiques.

### 5.3. PROBLEMS WITH HONNETH'S ACCOUNT

Honneth's approach to social pathologies generally and his most recent account introduced above have met with a variety of insightful criticisms.

#### 5.3.1. Disconnecting Social Pathologies from the Subjective Experience of Suffering

However appropriate Honneth's move to disconnect the diagnosis of social pathology from the subjective experience of suffering is, especially in light of the first generation or in light of other plausible assumptions, it is problematic. I will focus on two sets of problems with this conception of social pathology that disconnects the pathology from the experience of suffering: diagnosis and cure.<sup>63</sup>

Fabian Freyenhagen holds that talk of pathology is justified only insofar as it is ultimately manifested as suffering on the individual level. His reasons are twofold: first, it is just questionable why reference to “pathology” should be made unless there is something akin to illness going on, on the individual level; second, his commitment to “normative individualism” means that unless individuals are ultimately (negatively) affected by a practice, there is no reason to object to the practice.<sup>64</sup> Honneth himself is relatively modest in his disconnect. In *Freedom's Right* Honneth holds that symptoms of social pathologies are “often expressed by diffuse moods of depression or a loss of orientation”.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, when we look at accounts of social pathologies it is clear that individuals do suffer (objectively) because they are prevented from self-realisation. In his own response to Freyenhagen, Honneth additionally emphasises a distinction between “mental disorders” and “sociological behavioural problems”.<sup>66</sup> Here he seems to claim that social pathologies must be accompanied by “sociological behavioural problems”. However, not all those behavioural problems should be regarded as “mental disorders”, as this would unjustly broaden the medical category. Thus, the disconnect is not between the pathology and any negative effect, but between the pathology and a subjective experience of it that would cause individuals to seek help or motivate them to seek change or even suggest to them that they are participating in pathological practices.

Arthur Bueno, drawing on Maeve Cooke, puts his worries forward in terms of “epistemic and ethical authoritarianism”.<sup>67</sup> Given the disconnect between pathology and subjective suffering, the diagnosis of pathology is either arbitrary or authoritarian. Without subjective suffering, there are no

(objective) criteria for a diagnosis that would allow individuals to assess the diagnosis. Consequently, the diagnosis might reflect the (arbitrary) taste of the critic or be based on criteria established by the critic (authoritarian), or it might be based on criteria deemed accessible only to the critic (elitism). One response might be to come up with objective, non-authoritarian, standards of social health. For Honneth, the standard will ultimately be human self-realisation. Given our dependency on relations of recognition, which must be facilitated through social structures that promote appropriate recognition in the different spheres, the institutional order and practices in these spheres should mutually support each other so as to enable members of a society to self-realise.<sup>68</sup> Bueno is unlikely to be satisfied with this account, since it is too vague to really guide diagnosis. Given its vagueness, diagnosis is still ultimately arbitrary or authoritarian. Another way around this problem might be to treat the diagnosis as a “suggestion” for reflection (in public debate). The possibly arbitrary or authoritarian nature is less problematic if the diagnosis is put forward as a suggestion of a social analysis. Individuals are invited to consider the arguments and narratives in favour of the diagnosis but ultimately they themselves must judge its appropriateness. Thus, where a diagnosis is presented without an accompanying subjective experience of suffering, the diagnosis itself works as a way of drawing attention to specific mechanisms and stimulating critical reflective activity.

This approach would take care of therapeutic worries as well. When we consider the link Honneth makes between “negative emotional reactions” and motivation to change, disconnecting the emotional experience from pathology is problematic because we also lose a plausible link to social action. In the absence of subjective suffering, individuals are unlikely to seek a cure. But given the considerations above, it seems that this is exactly where Critical Theory, with its suggestive critical analyses, is important. While I do not want to overplay the analogy, comparisons to the medical context might help. When we go for checkups, tests might show that we carry a pathogen or are otherwise affected by a pathology, which we do not subjectively experience. Specialists and general practitioners must convince and motivate us to undergo therapy. Critical Theorists are very much in the business of convincing those who are unaware that they are affected by and perpetuating a social pathology. As mentioned in chapter 2, the method of Critical Theory is to some extent determined by its emancipatory aim, which, importantly, involves motivating individuals to bring about social change. Convincing individuals that they are participating in “wrong” social practices and perpetuating “wrong” social structures may require a variety of things, and social critics probably have to provide a plausible theory of how specific mechanisms operate in pathological ways—sometimes “behind our back”. They also have to provide a compelling account of the way in which given practices, structures or institutions are pathological. This might require offering

novel ways of looking at practices. In order to stimulate reflection, Critical Theorists might employ rhetorical tools, or they might provide a world-disclosing critique, à la Adorno and Horkheimer. However, it is important that the social critic does not undermine the rationality of the addressee.

In order to avoid authoritarianism, arbitrariness and elitism and in order to respect the autonomy of individuals and also so that the critique has good chances of motivating audiences to engage in transformative (emancipatory) action, the analysis or diagnosis must be open to contestation in debate. Everyone must be allowed to question, argue about, accept or reject a social analysis. This debate is not aimed at consensus. Individuals must decide for themselves whether to regard a diagnosis as valid. Disagreement here is neither problematic nor unwanted. Further transformative action is possible if a sufficient number of individuals agree with a specific analysis. Moreover, the debate itself, insofar as it stimulates reflection, can be seen as part of the cure. Through debate, reflection is brought to focus on suspicious mechanisms that try to undermine rationality. Some worries remain, however, since this image requires individuals to already be autonomous and rational and be able to resist oppressive (and deceptive) forces in debate. In other words, it is likely that some individuals accept or reject social analyses for reasons other than their (objective) validity. This is part of the very problem that some Critical Theorists try to capture when they speak of social pathology (as deformation of reason or colonisation of the lifeworld, which might include distorted communication). The problematic history of the concept of “social pathology” attests to the seriousness of these worries.

For this reason, Honneth is best off by combining the formal conception, which provides a framework, with openness to contestation and debate of the concrete diagnoses I have outlined above. The formal conception allows him to avoid the worst abuses.

Given the problematic history of the conception of social pathology, we might wonder about the value of the language of social pathology. In light of the disconnect of subjective suffering (and thus the subjective experience of “illness”) from the diagnosis, it becomes maybe even more important to justify this language. In “Diseases of Society”, Honneth links the language of pathology to an organicistic view of society, described above. To the degree to which society can be seen as akin to an organism, states or processes that threaten the survival or that disturb the proper functioning of this social organism should be conceived of as illnesses, much like states or processes that threaten the survival of (biological) organisms are conceived. Laitinen, Särkelä and Heikki Ikäheimo offer an interpretation of society as a life process, developing out of biological organisms, where stagnation and degeneration (regression) should be seen as illnesses because they threaten survival. In both—Honneth’s case and Laitinen, Särkelä and Ikäheimo’s more detailed explanation—the language of social pathology is justified on naturalist

grounds. Social pathologies are labelled as such because they are pathologies.<sup>69</sup> The interpretation of Honneth's naturalist commitment in terms of society as a life process and social pathologies as stagnation or degeneration also fits with the idea of critical reflection as therapeutic, as disrupting stagnation and reviving change (the life process). The Critical Theorist, by stimulating reflection with diagnosis, combats stagnation. The question, of course, would be whether social pathologies can all be classed as stagnation or degeneration and what the exact understanding of stagnation and degeneration would be.

For Honneth, the interpretation of his naturalist commitment in terms of life processes rather than a substance view of an organism should be acceptable, as it is able to justify the language of pathology and requires no link between social pathology and subjective suffering.

### **5.3.2. Lack of Unity**

Honneth's approach to social pathologies has also met with general criticism. One problem seems to be the apparent lack of unity. Christopher F. Zurn intends to link Honneth's various diagnoses of social pathology up into one "definition" of social pathology as "second-order disorder". On Zurn's account, social pathologies are those social wrongs or socially caused impediments to free self-realisation that are "[constituted by] disconnects between first-order contents and second-order reflexive comprehension".<sup>70</sup> Further, these disconnects are caused by social practices, structures or institutions and "pervasively experienced throughout society".<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the disconnects (between first and second order) serve to maintain the status quo or prevent emancipatory insights and action.<sup>72</sup> There are various issues with Zurn's account. For one, it is not clear whether the level of abstractness and vagueness in the account is a strength or a weakness. What constitutes a first-order content and second-order reflexive comprehension seems to differ from case to case. Sometimes subjective beliefs are considered to be first-order contents, other times social structures. Second-order contents are sometimes interpreted to be an awareness of belief formation; other times it is an awareness of the nature of social structures. The disconnect is sometimes distributed across groups (e.g. in the case of invisibilisation<sup>73</sup>). Consequently, Zurn's proposal is much discussed in the literature.<sup>74</sup> Freyenhagen rejects Zurn's unitary account and insists on differences between (explicit or implicit) notions of pathology in Honneth.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, given the different accounts presented in this chapter, it seems that Zurn cannot plausibly account for all of them (of course the above vagueness helps him to modify the ideas of first-order and second-order contents to fit a variety of cases). Moreover, given that Honneth criticises the first generation and Habermas's accounts of social pathology for their narrow focus on rationality, it seems odd that he is

moved to accept Zurn's account of social pathologies as cognitive pathologies. We might also wonder whether Honneth needs a unifying account. A unifying account explains why some phenomena are grouped together. It lends itself to conceptual tidiness. But Honneth can provide a broad, overarching account of social pathologies as disturbances to self-realisation caused by social structures or practices. We can then, with reference to Laitinen and Särkelä, further distinguish between sub-types of social pathology. We might opt for a broad category especially if we think that the diversity of the different accounts tracks social reality. Accounts are diverse because there are various different mechanisms of oppression which work together in different ways. In some cases the exact nature needs to be investigated more and from more perspectives.<sup>76</sup> The broad category also makes visible the blurred boundaries between justice and social pathology in Honneth.

### 5.3.3. Pathology and Justice

There are various reasons why one might value a pathology framework in addition to a "justice framework". In liberal thought the justice framework typically analyses social wrong in terms of injustices as rights violations. It opens space for the idea of universal human rights. As such, the justice framework seems valuable. However, one might think that the social pathology framework allows for deeper social analyses. It can identify as social wrong practices that do not constitute rights violations (e.g. self-reification or aspects of organised self-realisation) but that prevent human emancipation. The social pathology framework can appeal to (contested and contestable) notions of the good, in which the justice framework typically restricts itself to notions of the right and aims to be neutral with respect to substantive notions of the good. (I will discuss problems with this presumed neutrality in chapter 7.)

One might also commit only to the social pathology framework and reject the justice framework as pathological super-structure. Some Marxists, for example, might see the justice framework as based on the idea of persons as property owners and rights modelled on property ownership. Or one might suspect, irrespective of the origin of the justice framework, that in capitalist societies it is complicit in perpetuating the status quo and protecting private property. Following Marx (as we will see in the next chapter), one might further hold that the institution of property and hence the justice framework are linked to and complicit in alienation, which we can understand as pathology. In that sense, the justice framework is pathological. Similarly, one might have Adornian suspicions. Adorno holds that the justice framework requires relations of equivalence, as we must be able to compare cases, deeds, individuals and so on. Equivalence and identity thinking imply the

negation of particularity. Identity thinking is a form of abstraction, thus suspect of being pathological. The pathology framework here has the important function of allowing a particular type of critique of the justice framework. There is room for normative appeal beyond justice.

Honneth rejects this Adornian suspicion. His recognition theory encompasses a justice framework and a social pathology paradigm. Both play essential roles in his social criticism. In Honneth, however, the boundaries between the justice framework and the pathology framework are blurred. Whereas Marxists and Adornians understand justice in terms of a distributive paradigm (see chapter 7) and pathology in terms of self-realisation, Honneth understands both justice and pathology in terms of recognition. Injustices are failures of cognitive relations, and the distributive paradigm is to be complemented with a cognitive dimension (see chapter 7). However, the universal dimension of the justice framework is never abandoned in Honneth. Social pathologies are also understood in terms of the cognitive needs of individuals. As we have seen in this chapter and the previous chapter, both justice and social pathology refer to a formal conception of the good. There are important differences in terms of blameworthiness, of course.

The concern I want to highlight is not so much about the classification of phenomena as either injustice or social pathology. The worry is that there is no room to appeal, that Honneth proposes a form of cognitive totalitarianism. Recognition is the standard of ethics, morality, justice and health. Honneth, of course, presents arguments for the normative status of recognition. Yet we might want to have a second normative framework to which we can appeal to test the cognitive framework.

#### 5.4. CONCLUSION

Honneth's recognition-theoretical account of social pathology, notwithstanding the lack of a dialectical relation to justice, offers us powerful tools for social critique and transformation. Broadly, we can understand social pathologies as those beliefs, patterns of thought and practices that present obstacles to self-realisation but might not be captured by the justice framework (we can be vague here). Moreover, these practices or beliefs are socially caused. They present normative wrongs that are distinct from moral wrongs because subjects lack the intentional setup and are not morally blameworthy.

Further, social pathologies can be pathologies of reason, but not all are. Moreover, they can be manifested in experiences of suffering or other negative emotional responses, but not all of them are. Even if one rejected Honneth's naturalism, one could speak of "social pathologies" rather than social wrongs, not because of one common structure that distinguishes pathologies from social wrongs but because various aspects are best described

by the metaphor (spread, diagnosis, cure) and because talk of “pathology” itself might be emancipatory in that it might be radical enough to demand attention while avoiding eliciting self-defensive responses, since it does not distribute blame among individuals.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.
2. See, for example, the special issue of *Studies in Social and Political Thought* edited by Laitinen, Särkelä and Ikäheimo, especially the articles by Arentshorst, Laitinen, Ikäheimo, Hirvonen, Gregoratto and Särkelä, but see also Zurn, “Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders”; Bueno, “The Psychic Life of Freedom”; Hirvonen and Pennanen, “Populism as a Pathological Form of Politics of Recognition”; Laitinen and Särkelä, “Four Conceptions of Social Pathology”; Harris, “Recovering the Critical Potential of Social Pathology Diagnosis”; Freyenhagen, “Honneth on Social Pathologies: A Critique”.
3. Zurn, “Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders”; Laitinen and Särkelä, “Four Conceptions of Social Pathology”; Neal Harris even suggests five dimensions of social pathology (Harris, “Recovering the Critical Potential of Social Pathology Diagnosis”).
4. See, for example, Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 338–39.
5. Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 345.
6. In *Freedom’s Right*, Honneth distinguishes between social pathologies and misdevelopments. The distinction is highly controversial, and given a lack of space to do justice to the debate and the fact that this distinction is not relevant for the arguments in this chapter, I will not cover it here.
7. For this distinction between injustice and social pathology, see Honneth, *Reification*.
8. Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 346.
9. Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 345.
10. Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 349.
11. Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 340.
12. Of course, unlike Hegel, Marx and Critical Theorists cannot explain these deformations of rationality in terms of a metaphysical notion of “spirit”. Rather, they must turn to sociology and history to explain how deformations come into play. Honneth, “A Social Pathology of Reason”, 347; Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory”.
13. Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”, 23–26.
14. Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social”, 19–21.
15. Although he also refers to history and historical progress when reconstructing social norms and justifying them (see Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*).
16. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 135.
17. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 135.
18. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 135.
19. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 136.
20. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 135.
21. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 135.
22. Honneth, *Reification*, 40–52.
23. Honneth, *Reification*, 29, 40–52.
24. Honneth, *Reification*, 43.
25. We find a similar view in MacIntyre’s *Dependent Rational Animals*; here the claim extends to not only human children but all animals capable of learning. In order to learn or understand what we are taught, we must, according to MacIntyre, understand the intentions of our interlocutor. For example, we must know what the other means when she says “chair”. This in turn requires some form of empathetic identification.
26. *Reification*, 46–52.
27. Honneth here, as in various other places, differs from Lukács’s conception of reification. For Lukács, reification is the objectification and abstraction caused by the influence of the

practice of commodity exchange on our fundamental attitudes towards the world. Similarly, for Erich Fromm, the pathology of “narcissism” is due to a “process of abstractification”, whereby due to capitalist market demands we begin to think of objects as commodities and so abstract from their concreteness and eventually apply this abstract thinking also to others and ourselves. See Fromm, *Die Pathologie der Normalität*.

28. The description of racism as a form of reification is problematic in light of Honneth’s stance on moral blameworthiness. The best way to understand Honneth here might be in terms of implicit biases which people cannot help to have—but which they are accountable for acting on or against.

29. See also Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, who criticises Honneth for his failure to provide an ecological theory, even though ecological concerns are at the root of Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*.

30. Honneth, *Reification*, 65.

31. See Butler, “Taking Another’s View”; Geuss, “Philosophical Anthropology and Social Criticism”; Lear, “The Slippery Middle”.

32. Honneth, “Rejoinder”, in *Reification*.

33. McNay, *Against Recognition*; Butler, *Undoing Gender*; McQueen, “Honneth, Butler and the Ambivalent Effects of Recognition”.

34. McNay, *Against Recognition*.

35. Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

36. Honneth addresses Althusser’s descriptive account of recognition (esp. 75–77 in *The I in We*). He holds that in Althusser’s “one-dimensional” understanding of recognition there is no space to distinguish between ideological and proper recognition. In Althusser’s model, all recognition—as a matter of fact—imposes an identity on subjects which conforms to social norms. Honneth’s move to just “stipulate” that proper recognition is positive (81) might be disappointing. However, I will discuss possible Honnethian (rather than Honneth’s own) responses in chapter 8.

37. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 81.

38. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 80.

39. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 83–84.

40. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 92.

41. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 83; see also Honneth, “Grounding Recognition”.

42. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, 87.

43. What counts as social development rather than misdevelopment is contested. The commitment to human emancipation might help to distinguish progressive from regressive social changes to some degree, but of course “emancipation” is an equally contested notion. Honneth can refer back to recognition struggles against oppression as engines for progressive changes. Such struggles suggest which social practices are regressive because they are oppressive. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, which recognition claims are legitimate (and which recognition struggles are thus struggles against oppression) is also contested. In Honneth’s defence, being contested is not necessarily problematic. In fact, contestation (struggle) invites debate and reflection on values (and thus drives the social learning process).

44. See, for example, Nachtway, *Die Abstiegsgesellschaft*.

45. As we will see in chapter 8, Honneth might be able to use “normalising recognition” in those cases for a critique of social structures.

46. Honneth thinks that rather than availability of recognition, credibility matters for practical self-relation; ignoring that availability might very well also affect credibility—that is, if only normalising recognition is available to us, this might lend to its credibility.

47. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, 88.

48. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 91–92.

49. Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *The I in We*, 92.

50. Honneth, “Organized Self-Realization”, 160.

51. For a similar analysis of pathological tendencies in capitalism, see also Hartmann and Honneth, “Paradoxes of Capitalism”.

52. I cannot here do justice to all the modifications. I have to, for example, forgo an analysis of his controversial distinction of misdevelopments and social pathologies. Social pathologies are “any social development that significantly impairs the ability to take part rationally in important forms of social cooperation” (Honneth, *Freedom's Right*, 86) where these developments are due to “misinterpretations” of normative principles “for which the rules of action themselves are at least partly responsible” (Honneth, *Freedom's Right*, 128). Examples of social pathologies are cases where individuals “absolutise” legal freedom or moral freedom—that is, they think that freedom is fully captured by either of these conceptions, which really only pick out one aspect of freedom. This misinterpretation of, for example, legal freedom, which does not recognise that legal freedom is but one aspect of freedom, is due to tendencies within legal freedom itself. The legal conception of freedom can “colonise” our everyday thinking and behaviour. It becomes a “habit of thought” to see ourselves in more and more situations as if we are preparing for a court case. Misdevelopments, however, are due to externally caused “deviations” from the normative principles. These “deviations” are “not . . . promoted by the corresponding system of action”. In some sense, then, the normative principles are unproblematic in the case of misdevelopments, as there is no tendency inherent in them which invites misinterpretation that leads to practices which undermine self-realisation. For a detailed discussion, see Freyenhagen, “Honneth on Social Pathologies”; Honneth, “Rejoinder”, in *Critical Horizons* (2015).

53. Honneth, *Freedom's Right*, 86.

54. Honneth, *Freedom's Right*, 87.

55. Honneth, “Diseases of Society”, 701.

56. Honneth, “Diseases of Society”, 698.

57. See Arthur Bueno, “The Psychic Life of Freedom”. See also Hirvonen, “Pathologies of Collective Recognition”; Laitinen and Särkelä, “Four Conceptions of Social Pathology”. Considerations about the underlying metaphysical picture have led Laitinen and Särkelä to suggest a view of society as a life process rather than as a (static) organism. On this view one way to understand social pathologies would be in terms of “stagnation” of the life process; social critique would constitute a type of therapy by reviving the life process.

58. Honneth, “Diseases of Society”, 687.

59. Honneth, “Diseases of Society”, 687.

60. Honneth, “Diseases of Society”, 688.

61. See Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory”; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening”, in *The Culture Industry*.

62. See, for example, Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance”.

63. Some philosophers rightly point to a further set of issues with Honneth's particular account of diseased society as involving either vague or implausible ontological commitments. For reasons of brevity, I cannot follow up this debate here. For this debate, see Bueno, “The Psychic Life of Freedom”; Hirvonen, “Pathologies of Collective Recognition”; and Laitinen, Särkelä and Ikäheimo, “Pathologies of Recognition”.

64. Freyenhagen, “Honneth on Social Pathologies” (for his commitment to “normative individualism”, 146; for his critique of Honneth, 145–46).

65. Honneth, *Freedom's Right*, 87, italics mine.

66. Honneth, “Rejoinder” (2015), 216.

67. Bueno, “The Psychic Life of Freedom”; Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*.

68. See Honneth, “Diseases of Society”; Honneth, *Die Idee des Sozialismus*.

69. Or, in other words, certain things are social wrongs because they are pathologies. Laitinen, Särkelä and Ikäheimo contrast such naturalist accounts with “normative accounts”, which call something a social pathology because it is a social wrong (Laitinen, Särkelä and Ikäheimo, “Pathologies of Recognition”).

70. Zurn, “Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders”, 345–46.

71. Zurn, “Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders”, 362.

72. Zurn, “Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders”, 349.

73. Zurn, “Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders”, 346–61.

74. Arto Laitinen, for example, expands on a tidied-up version of Zurn's account by clarifying the nature of first- and second-order contents as well as adding a third-order disconnect, which prevents emancipatory action even if participants are fully aware of social structures and belief formation. Arguably, such a case makes more sense of the paradoxes of individualisation Honneth discusses in "organised self-realisation" (Laitinen, "Social Pathologies, Reflexive Pathologies, and the Idea of Higher-Order Disorders"). I would like to point out one feature of Zurn's definition. Conceiving of social pathologies as second-order disorders helps to revive the link between rationality and pathology, which goes back to Hegel, Marx and—of course—Adorno and Horkheimer. Moreover, connected to this relationship is the relationship between diagnosing and hence exposing social pathologies and practicing ideology critique. Zurn, *Axel Honneth*, esp. 99–100.

75. See Zurn, "Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders"; see also Zurn, *Axel Honneth*; Freyenhagen, "Honneth on Social Pathologies".

76. See also Zurn, *Axel Honneth*.



## *Chapter Six*

# **Social Freedom and Recognition- Theoretical Socialism**

In this chapter, I will assess the normative social theory and the critique of capitalism Honneth offers in his recent works *Freedom's Right* (FR) and *Die Idee des Sozialismus* (DIDS)/*The Idea of Socialism* (TIOS). In these works, Honneth focuses on freedom. However, the particular conception of freedom he proposes, social freedom, is a recognition-theoretical conception of freedom. Freedom depends on and is co-constituted by relations of mutual recognition in the different recognition spheres. Honneth also expands his use of “normative reconstruction” as a method to normatively ground freedom and recognition. FR is in many ways an ambitious and insightful modernisation of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. As such, it is unsurprising that Honneth appropriates a version of Hegelian normative reconstruction in order to establish a normative framework that is at the same time immanently derived from social institutions and a standard of social critique.<sup>1</sup>

The first sections of this chapter will focus on the core aspects of the theory Honneth proposes in FR. I will begin by assessing Honneth’s methodological shift to “normative reconstruction” before introducing his different conceptions of freedom. Following some comments on Marx and a Marxian view of social freedom in section 6.3, the main part of the discussion about FR concerns Honneth’s arguments for the role of social freedom and its potency as a critical standpoint. The last section will discuss Honneth’s recognition-theoretical account of socialism in TIOS, both as an account of socialism in its own right and as a continuation of FR and a reply to some criticisms about the scope of FR. As in previous chapters, I will not be able to cover all of the rich literature on FR.

## 6.1. NORMATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

In FR, Honneth adapts Hegel's method of "normative reconstruction", which Hegel employs in the *Philosophy of Right* to formulate a normative theory that is neither grounded in Kantian constructivism nor doomed to relativism or conventionalism. Hegel is critical of both Kantian construction of universal ideals, formulated independently of social reality and applied to it as external standards, on the one hand, and the uncritical acceptance of social structures, on the other. Instead, Hegel aims to overcome constructivism by deriving his normative theory immanently from the values embodied by social institutions. He avoids relativism by justifying the immanently derived normative theory with reference to the context-transcending standard of rationality. The values embodied by those social institutions that can be shown to be rational are justified. Hegel himself has further recourse to the theory of spirit to ground rational justification. This option, however, is not available to Honneth.<sup>2</sup> In his adaptation, Honneth must replace the metaphysical support Hegel has or else be content with a much less compelling argument. Hegel will conclude that rationality is freedom. The standard by which we assess the rationality of social institutions is freedom, which means that social institutions that realise, enable and protect freedom are rational.<sup>3</sup> Freedom is the measure of social rationality and, hence, of justice.

As we have seen, Honneth also rejects constructivism, ethical authoritarianism, and relativism or conventionalism. He thus also aims to normatively reconstruct a theory of justice from those social institutions which are essential for social reproduction.<sup>4</sup> Following Talcott Parsons, Honneth understands society in terms of the shared values and ideals which are manifested in objectified expectations. This means that shared values and ideas guide the day-to-day activities of members by determining role expectations and through shared internalised social meanings. These shared ideas and values also determine what kinds of social developments are conceivable and/or desirable for members of a society. Ethical values or their instantiation as norms guide actions in every social area and sub-area through the mechanisms of "role expectations" and "implicit responsibilities".<sup>5</sup> These shared norms or values are embodied in social institutions. Societies can survive only if members continue to share values and ideals; hence, social reproduction depends on members' continued affirmation of these values.<sup>6</sup> In the context of value pluralism, members of societies need to agree at least on an abstract notion of the common good on the ends of social cooperation.

Normative reconstruction focuses only on those values which are essential for the reproduction of a given society, the values that determine a society's understanding of justice.<sup>7</sup> Further, normative reconstruction analyses a society in terms of those institutions that are most important for the stability of the normative core of social life—that is, ethical life. Moreover, Honneth

claims that the norms and values which are the objects of normative reconstruction are those that are superior to historically antecedent values and norms.<sup>8</sup> Honneth thus maintains a commitment to history as a moral learning process. However, progress is conceived of as ruptured and contingent rather than inevitable.<sup>9</sup> Nor is Honneth's notion of progress grounded in the metaphysical idea of spirit actualising itself. Rather, progress is an assumption we have to make in order to make sense of history and in order to be able to take up a normative position in the present. Honneth's justification of our commitment to progress is Kantian, rather than Hegelian.<sup>10</sup> We will discuss the problematic nature of Honneth's commitment to past historical progress in chapter 8. From what has been said so far, it follows that normative reconstruction is selective and it does not necessarily describe the institutional setup of a society in the same way in which social science would. In the foreground of normative reconstruction are institutions and interpretations which best capture the highest-developed shared normative understandings of a society.

Importantly for Honneth, normative reconstruction has critical potency. The values of the institutions that we reconstruct serve as a standard for immanent critique of actual social and institutional practices and structures insofar as they fail to satisfactorily embody these values. We will see below that social freedom is thus meant to become a potent measure against which Honneth understands social pathologies and misdevelopments and can demand institutional change.

However, Honneth's method in FR is controversial. It seems that by basing his normative framework on prevalent values, Honneth precludes the possibility of "normative revolutions" and "radical critique". This might unnecessarily limit the scope of critique and is problematic, inasmuch as Critical Theory should allow radical critique and keep open the space and possibility for normative revolutions.<sup>11</sup> Normative revolutions require radical critique—that is, a critique of the norms that underlie social institutions.<sup>12</sup> Normative reconstruction is confined to immanent critique of institutions if and where they fail to realise socially accepted values. It can thus only allow "gradual progress" and institutional reform rather than "revolutionary progress" or normative revolutions—that is, revolutions in which social institutions *and* their underlying norms are replaced by new social institutions based on new norms.<sup>13</sup> Jörg Schaub holds that the reformist limitations of normative reconstruction condemn Critical Theory to silence on a variety of issues: We cannot criticise norms themselves for internal inconsistency.<sup>14</sup> Nor are we able to criticise norms if they themselves embody social misdevelopments or pathologies. In other words, we have to be silent about those norms that are institutionalisations of oppressive practices and structures.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Schaub claims that there might be negative social experiences and social struggles which are out of bounds for critical social theory. For exam-

ple, Schaub offers an interpretation of the “silence” of the “occupy movement” as “disillusionment” with the norms and values that underlie our institutions.<sup>16</sup>

In response, much seems to hinge on Honneth’s philosophical-historical commitment. If normative reconstruction unearths the highest values available, such worries are taken care of. If freedom is the highest value, it does not matter that we cannot engage in normative revolutions. However, such an assumption flies in the face of very fundamental first-generation ideas: the idea that we cannot, from the perspective of an oppressed society, correctly outline or predict the values of a future, emancipated society (which would presumably embody the highest values). Irrespective of this break with the self-reflective caution of the first generation, Schaub, Freyenhagen and David McNeill, for example, all claim that Honneth fails to show the “historical superiority” of freedom in a backward-looking way (i.e. compared to past normative orders) and even more so in a more absolute sense that would establish that radical critique is no longer needed.<sup>17</sup> In a move reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer, Schaub holds that Honneth fails to show that active social reproduction in a truly free society “cannot be the effect of . . . domination”. This means he fails to show that the current norms really are freedom guaranteeing. Given that much Critical Theory is concerned with the willing participation of individuals in their own domination, the reliance on active, un-coerced, participation to guarantee freedom from domination seems odd.

In his 2015 “Rejoinder” to the above, Honneth replies with two distinct arguments for the superiority of the value of freedom. Honneth’s first argument, the “historico-empirical” argument, holds that most social struggles have historically been based on one or another conception of “freedom”—for example, struggles for the abolition of slavery, for workers’ rights, gay rights and struggles for more equality. Historically, then, some version of “freedom” has served as an evaluative standard. We can, in the future, possibly expect further differentiations of the conceptions of freedom, as new obstacles to the realisation of freedom are to be overcome (and part of overcoming obstacles is to identify and formulate what aspect of freedom is impeded), but we cannot expect a normative revolution. “Given the principles which govern our intersubjective spheres of action, it is impossible to imagine their undergoing any normative change, other than through the development of one of the many varieties of individual freedom”.<sup>18</sup>

Honneth also offers a “metaphysical argument” in support. Here he replaces the Hegelian ontological basis of Hegel’s original argument for the superiority of freedom with a different type of argument: “By socially institutionalizing the principle of individual freedom we have achieved a reflection of the ‘real’—that is, the only justifiable form of the—grounding of social order”.<sup>19</sup>

Only those social orders are justified to which individuals autonomously consent. However, the very idea and realisation of autonomous consent of individuals depends on and derives from “individual freedom”. Thus, the standard by which we understand justification and evaluation is freedom. Moving beyond the idea of freedom would mean that we would move beyond that which is justifiable. In societies with freedom-embodying institutions, “we have created the normative procedure with which we can mutually justify our social conditions. . . . We cannot go beyond the normative framework of modern societies, as we find the discursive functioning of our Spirit [*Geist*], which is dependent on reciprocal agreement, reflected in that social order”.<sup>20</sup> It is important here that this claim does not depend on undistorted autonomy (which Schaub is concerned with). The argument works because we understand justification as essentially linked to autonomy. However, the argument seems somewhat circular. It suggests that from the perspective of the necessity and superiority of freedom, we cannot imagine a normative revolution that overhauls the status of freedom. It is because we value freedom that we legitimise social orders in terms of consent.

Honneth could tackle Schaub’s objections differently. He could question the origin of those “external” norms we seem to require for radical critique and normative revolutions. Plausibly, external standards are linked to either ethical authoritarianism or constructivism, which Honneth as a left-Hegelian Critical Theorist needs to avoid. Moreover, as we will see towards the end of this chapter, we can read TIOS as a response to the worry about the limitation of the scope of critique. While his theory of socialism is based on the value of social freedom, it might require substantial institutional changes.

However, in the end those replies are not compelling. We have little reason to commit to an idea of “the end of history”, such that no more normative revolutions are possible. Just because we cannot now imagine a (normative) framework in which current understandings of freedom are not the highest value does not mean there should not, in the future, be such a framework—though admittedly such a future normative code would require a radical reinterpretation of the idea of “emancipation”. Having said that, it is also not clear whether Honneth requires such a commitment in order to get a critique based on social freedom off the ground. As we saw in previous chapters, and as I will argue in the last chapter, Honneth can normatively ground his recognition theory in anthropological terms, and so he could also normatively ground his recognition-theoretical view of freedom in those terms.

## 6.2. HONNETH'S FR: THREE TYPES OF FREEDOM

Given that freedom is the highest value currently, the task of FR is to work out the most compelling conception of freedom. Following Hegel, Honneth also distinguishes between three conceptions of freedom, all of which are embodied in different social institutions and so all of them seem to be normatively “valid”—that is, recognised as valuable. The different conceptions of freedom—negative, reflexive and social—are also associated with different approaches to political philosophy. In Honneth, all of these conceptions are valuable in their own right, in the appropriate context. Problems occur once either negative freedom or reflexive freedom is “absolutised” and comes to govern spheres and institutions that should be governed by social freedom.

### 6.2.1. Negative Freedom

Negative freedom refers to the idea of freedom as “freedom from” constraints or as want satisfaction.<sup>21</sup> Honneth traces the idea of negative freedom to Thomas Hobbes.<sup>22</sup> We are free whenever we can act in accordance with our desires, unhindered by external obstacles, and irrespective of whether our desires are rational or healthy or beneficial or where and how these desires originate. In terms of political philosophy, it underlies the type of social contract theory that Hobbes, John Locke and Robert Nozick propose: Justice is conceived as whatever individuals (hypothetically or actually) agree to, where individuals are conceived of as ultimately independent, self-sufficient, rational, self-interested agents.<sup>23</sup> The conception of freedom as negative freedom in social contract theories is compatible with highly individualised conceptions of persons. Honneth reads Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of freedom as negative freedom as well. Existential freedom, especially the freedom (and need) to choose one’s fundamental project, is also decoupled from reflection. Reflection cannot fundamentally justify a subject’s choice (rather, we choose to follow reflective judgements or not according to our arbitrary will).<sup>24</sup>

Approaches which understand freedom exclusively in terms of negative freedom struggle to account for the entire spectrum of social and political cooperation. Sartre, for example, has difficulties explaining how or why justice should be binding on radically free subjects. Liberal and libertarian contract theories can only make a case for social cooperation and political participation in terms of strategic self-interest. Only if it is beneficial for individuals to cooperate have they reason to cooperate (especially since cooperation involves sacrifice). This means that explanations of forms of cooperation that are not clearly beneficial become complex and implausible. However, as long as negative freedom is seen as but one aspect of freedom, it is valuable. Negative freedom guarantees a space for the pursuit of personal aims, free from moral and social obligations (beyond that of respecting the

negative freedom of others), and it is embodied in contemporary societies in legal institutions, which guarantee rights to non-interference.<sup>25</sup>

If, however, we mistakenly absolutise negative freedom, we are prone to pathological practices. The particular pathology associated with legal freedom is described by Honneth with reference to examples in literature and movies: If we understand freedom only in terms of negative freedom, we could succumb to a limited notion of our own possibilities. Or, like Ted Kramer in *Kramer vs. Kramer*, we would begin to live life as the ongoing preparation of a court case, always considering how actions or incidents could be construed in terms of the law. Alternatively, the indeterminacy of negative freedom might lead to extreme indecisiveness.<sup>26</sup>

### 6.2.2. Reflexive Freedom

Negative freedom has to be complemented by reflexive and social freedom. Reflexive freedom conceives of individuals as free insofar as they act in accordance with an autonomous or authentic will. Honneth traces reflexive freedom back at least as far as Aristotle, Rousseau and Kant. The Rousseauian line interprets reflexive freedom in terms of authenticity. Individuals act freely if they follow those intentions that are truly their own or reflect their true self or contribute to self-realisation.<sup>27</sup> The Kantian interpretation of freedom is along the lines of autonomy. Agents are free if they act in accordance with self-imposed (rational) laws.<sup>28</sup> In both cases freedom requires that individuals can distance themselves from the immediacy of desires, reflect on them and either affirm or disown them depending on whether these desires honour or promote autonomy or self-realisation. In our reflections, we should also acknowledge our dependence on others. As we have seen in the previous chapters, self-realisation and the capacity for autonomy depend on our cognitive relations with others.<sup>29</sup> The acknowledgement of our dependence on others informs the theory of justice associated with reflexive freedom. Reflexive freedom is associated with proceduralism where the principles of justice are determined in discourse (“collective self-determination”).<sup>30</sup> Alternatively, justice can be understood in terms of providing the resources necessary for individual self-formation and self-realisations<sup>31</sup> or for “collective self-realisation”.<sup>32</sup> Honneth claims that reflexive freedom makes reference to the need for social cooperation, but this social cooperation is still regarded as something external to freedom. It is an external condition rather than an intrinsic feature of freedom itself.<sup>33</sup>

In contemporary society reflexive freedom is associated with the sphere of morality. It is valuable because it secures our right to temporarily withdraw and critically evaluate our social commitments and voice concerns. Again, if absolutised, reflexive freedom is associated with specific types of social pathology. In this case, Honneth associates the deficit with moral

rigorism or moral terrorism. As an example of the latter, Honneth points to the violent and ruthless righteousness of Ulrike Meinhof, a member of a German terrorist group in the 1970s.<sup>34</sup>

### 6.2.3. Social Freedom

Both negative freedom and reflexive freedom are completed by social freedom. The bulk of FR is dedicated to an exposition and critical application of the nature and conditions of social freedom. In social freedom, the intersubjective dimension is regarded as intrinsic to freedom. We recognise that the self-realisation and freedom of the other is the condition of our own self-realisation and freedom. This intersubjective moment of freedom must be institutionalised. Social freedom can only be realised in institutions of mutual recognition. We need to be in relations of mutual recognition which include a mutual awareness (coming to be aware) of the fact that I depend on the other's very existence in order to realise my freedom fully and vice versa. According to Honneth, this must lead to the realisation that the other is part of my end, a condition and enabler of my freedom rather than obstacle. It is an abstract realisation of the fact that I am only “with myself in the other”, never without an other.<sup>35</sup>

In many ways the conception of social freedom provides a response to the problem of reconciling our vulnerable and dependent human nature with freedom. The Hegelian-Honnethian response to this problem differs from the Rousseauian response in one essential way: our dependence on each other becomes an intrinsic and valued part of freedom.<sup>36</sup> The important difference between discursive reflexive freedom and social freedom consists in a shift of perspective. Institutionalised forms of mutual recognition are an intrinsic part, an embodiment, of freedom. In other words, social freedom is intersubjective (reflexive) freedom that is institutionalised. Moreover, the interdependent dimension of freedom, where the other's freedom is the precondition of our own, is positively affirmed by individuals.

In the context of love relations and friendship, which are the paradigmatic instantiations of social freedom, Honneth speaks of social freedom in terms of supplementing and completing one another.<sup>37</sup> Social institutions, if they are to embody social freedom, must be such that they allow individuals to relate to each other in this way (to complete each other). Moreover, they must also facilitate awareness and positive appreciation of this relationship to the other. In other words, in social freedom the subjective aspect of freedom must be complemented by the objective aspect so that individuals possess personal and moral freedom as well as live in circumstances where the external world is and is perceived as free from heteronomy. Freedom from “all heteronomy and compulsion” is achieved when the social world is organised

and is understood to be organised in such a way that it enables the self-realisation of (all) individuals.<sup>38</sup>

Given the condition of interdependence, the objective dimension of freedom requires institutions that mediate our understanding of the other as “completion” as well as enabling actual relations of “completion”.<sup>39</sup> It seems fairly clear how Honneth understands social freedom in love and friendship, where individuals “see their own aims in the other”.<sup>40</sup> In those relationships, we “willingly limit ourselves with reference to the other”.<sup>41</sup> Importantly, limiting our egocentricity is not only necessary but also experienced as an expression of our will when loving the other. In love we can see how our (actual and originally unchosen) dependence on others is experienced not just as external limitation but actually as valuable and chosen. However, it is more difficult to understand what social freedom and “completion” mean in the context of the other spheres of ethical life—that is, the state and the market.

Timo Jütten offers a Marxian interpretation of completion as aiming to satisfy the needs of the other for the other’s sake. The other becomes the end of my action.<sup>42</sup> While this seems largely correct, it is also important to keep in mind that Honneth introduces his notion of social freedom with reference to Hegel and Marx. However, he downplays the differences between the two at a crucial moment—that is, when it comes to the question of the relations between social freedom and personal freedom (or individual freedom more generally). As we will see below, Marx suggests that social freedom and the notion of completion are incompatible with individual freedom, which allows occasional treatment of the other as a means to individual preference satisfaction in the market. Or, more accurately, the capitalist structure of the market and market exchange means that individuals act with their own self-interest as an end. If the needs of others are satisfied, this is merely incidental or a means of satisfying self-interest. In this sense, the need satisfaction in the capitalist market sphere is not an embodiment of “completion” and in fact undermines those attitudes that are part of social freedom.

In contrast to Marx, Hegel holds that individual freedom and social freedom are compatible. Exchange relations in the capitalist market do not undermine social freedom. Honneth sides with Hegel on the question of the compatibility of individual and social freedom and explicitly defends temporarily restricted moments of selfishness and egocentricity. In Honneth, those attitudes do not undermine social freedom as long as they are restricted and not absolutised (see above). However, in contrast to Hegel, Honneth tries to reconstruct the market as a sphere of social freedom, rather than individual freedom. Thus, it seems to be the case that moments of selfishness and self-interested actions are not incompatible with social freedom (an “inclusive view of completion”); at the heart, the market and the state should be spheres of social freedom. This means that both spheres should institutionally medi-

ate the kind of relations among individuals, in which individuals value/recognise the other's freedom as a precondition of their own freedom such that the needs of the other are made an end of the individual's actions as well. Because Marx's account of social freedom is important for understanding criticisms of Honneth's reconstruction of the market as a sphere of social freedom and for understanding difficulties with the approach to socialism that Honneth proposes in TIOS, I will look at Marx's view in more detail.

### 6.3. MARX ON SOCIAL FREEDOM

As mentioned above, for Hegel the social institutions that enable individual freedom become part of social freedom. The context in which freedom is exercised is self-determined.<sup>43</sup> This responds to the demand that free subjects must experience society as a manifestation of their freedom. The different conceptions of freedom are thus mutually compatible and complementary.

For Marx, however, social freedom is incompatible with individual freedom. It is possible to read early Marx's social critique as based on a conception of social freedom. The critique of alienated labour, for example, argues that capitalism is pathological partly because it structures human labour in such a way as to undermine social freedom and hence species being. "Social freedom" is closely connected to the notion of species being. Marx understands human nature in terms of distinctly human features and capacities. Human beings are essentially conscious of themselves as members of the human species. They have a self-conception that refers to humanity, and so other humans always enter into our self-conception. How we regard the other determines how we regard ourselves qua human being.<sup>44</sup> Our conception of human nature is determined by our relations to other human beings. If our relations to others are characterised by attitudes of misrecognition—for example, if we are treated (and treat others) as objects rather than free subjects—this must feed into our conception of our species.<sup>45</sup> Further, we are the kind of beings that need to objectify or externally manifest our self, our unique personality, through labour so that we come to know our will and our ability to act on the world. Moreover, we are dependent beings in at least the sense that we mutually depend on each other for subsistence and recognition. Marx adopts a Hegelian view of self-consciousness. We need to recognise and be recognised by others in order to be self-conscious. Recognition leads to self-affirmation and self-worth.<sup>46</sup> In order to value ourselves, we need to value our species, given that species membership is an essential part of our self-conception. If we value our species, we want to "do good" by our species—we want to work for the good of other members. Contributing to that which is valuable is itself valuable, and recognition by others is part of

contributing to this good. It is an external manifestation of the fact that I contributed to the good.<sup>47</sup>

Species being aims at self-realisation; human beings are the kind of creature that aims to realise and hence manifest themselves in the world. We must realise ourselves qua members of the human species as well as qua being a particular, unique individual. This means that we can only realise ourselves in “true community”. Here the manifestation of our unique personality, the product of un-estranged labour, contributes to the well-being of other human beings by satisfying their needs. This contribution is positively valued, and so our labour and the recognition thereof become part of our self-realisation. Our freedom (to self-realise) is dependent on and facilitated by others.

If “true community” and living true to our species being—that is, living an essentially human life—is what right or healthy life looks like, then capitalism is pathological in various ways. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx exposes various ways in which the organisation of labour is alienating. Famously, Marx distinguishes four kinds of alienation. First, in labour under capitalism workers are alienated from the product of their work. Insofar as the product is an objectification of labour itself, workers are also alienated from labour. Both labour and its product “oppose” labourers as something independent and “hostile”.<sup>48</sup> Second, the capitalist organisation of labour alienates from the process of labour, which is experienced as torturous and external. It requires self-denial and sacrifice when it is supposed to be a free and self-affirming life activity.<sup>49</sup> Third, the capitalist organisation of labour also alienates us from “species being” and our awareness of our humanity. One way in which we, as human beings, should manifest our humanity is by producing in accordance with free creativity and standards of beauty and generally in ways that distinguish us from non-human animals. Non-human animals produce in order to immediately satisfy subsistence needs. Their production is determined externally and production is but a means. Under capitalism, the labour of workers is similar to the production in non-human animals. It is externally determined and a mere means to (sometimes futile) attempts to survive. Lastly, Marx holds that as a consequence of being alienated from human essence we are also alienated from each other. Our relation to ourselves as human beings manifests itself in our relation to each other. And here, Marx claims, workers see the other, the non-producer, as the one who owns that which we have alienated; we see the other as the owner of our product and labour, and hence as an independent, hostile owner of us.<sup>50</sup> Alienated labour also affects the way the capitalist regards the worker.<sup>51</sup> And in the context of competition and scarcity of paid labour opportunities, which characterise capitalism for Marx, workers must regard fellow workers as hostile and independent or alien powers (who could take jobs).

The analysis of alienated labour is interesting for us in various ways. First, it is an example of the way in which social freedom is undermined in capitalism and, given Marx's argument, it shows that the standpoint of social freedom is a standpoint of critique. Second, it is here and in the relation between alienated labour and private property that we find one of the crucial differences in the accounts of social freedom between Marx and Hegel.

First, in order to get clearer about the relationship between species being and our relation to each other and social freedom, it makes sense to look at a few other writings of Marx. In the “Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*”, for example, Marx tells us that the “essence of man is the true community of man”. True “species-activity” and “species-spirit . . . [consist] in social activity and social enjoyment”.<sup>52</sup> This “true community” in which we can exercise our species-activity and species-spirit takes the form of “mutual alienation”<sup>53</sup> in capitalism. Under capitalism, human beings interact with each other as private property owners, where they identify their essence with their property, which, after all, objectifies their unique personality, and where mutual interaction takes the shape of exchange of this property—that is, in the mutual alienation of property. Hegel models his relations of right and legal freedom (individual freedom) on individuals as property owners. According to Marx, capitalism, with its specific interpretation of community and mutuality will always lead to alienated existence. Living true to human nature means recognising ourselves as members of the community of human beings, beings which are mutually dependent on each other.<sup>54</sup> If part of our essence is being in community with other, dependent beings, then working together to enjoy the products of our labour together and to enable each other to subsist and engage in free species activity is living by our essence. So, social freedom in Marx is nothing short of the realisation of our true human nature.

Second, when it comes to the relationship between social freedom and negative freedom in the form of private property rights, Marx clearly holds that these different conceptions of freedom are incompatible. Private property is, by nature, the result and cause of alienated labour. The conception of private property and society organised around the corresponding conception of freedom intellectually and practically undermines realisation of our humanity. Intellectually, we come to mistakenly identify true community with alienated community, as mentioned above. Practically, Marx holds that the relationship between private property, wage labour and alienation is such that emancipation requires that we abolish private property (and thus wage labour). Because we have private property, others can own the labour and product of workers. Wages are both the way in which labour and product are owned (bought) and the only way in which subsistence is possible for the wage labourer (i.e. by also owning some private property). The wage turns labour into a means, something external, owned by another. So, for Marx, it

is clear that if either private property or wages are abolished, the capitalist structure will collapse, which is the only path to freedom. Social freedom, which is the freedom to live in accordance with our essential nature, is thus opposed to negative freedom as institutionalised in the realm of (abstract) rights.<sup>55</sup>

Marx does not make a conceptual claim here. There is nothing intrinsic to the conception of negative liberty or its realisation in human rights that necessarily brings it in opposition with social concerns and substantial community being. Rather, this opposition is the result of the way in which our society is organised. What Marx doubts is that under capitalist realisation of liberty, it is possible to have a social institution that mediates between individual self-interest and communal interest.

Thus, while for Hegel, social freedom includes (guarantees of) individual, negative freedom as conceived of in capitalism, for Marx, social freedom seems to be incompatible with negative freedom as interpreted in capitalism. For now, we can note that Honneth agrees with both Hegel and Marx that we depend for the realisation of our freedom on the realisation of the freedom of others. Moreover, with Hegel and against Marx, Honneth thinks that social freedom proper also protects the conditions of and enables moderated manifestations of individual freedom. So social freedom also integrates the other conceptions of freedom.

#### 6.4. SOCIAL FREEDOM AND THE SPHERES OF JUSTICE

In order to make good of the claim that social freedom is a value that is normatively reconstructed, rather than an abstractly construed value which is then applied to the institutions (constructivism), and to be assured of its critical potency, Honneth must show that our social institutions must be understood as institutions that embody social freedom. Honneth's argument partly consists in an extensive historical reconstruction which I cannot possibly cover here. I will at times select an example to clarify his strategy and support his claims.

Honneth identifies three institutions that embody social freedom: the family, the market and democracy (the state). Because we have already discussed Honneth's account of the family sphere in previous chapters and the account he offers in FR does not differ significantly, I will focus here on a discussion of the market and democracy. His account of the market here can be taken as the backstory to his argument in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, as the market as a sphere of social freedom, which is a recognition-theoretical conception of freedom, supports his stance on redistributive claims as recognition claims.

### 6.4.1. Market

Honneth needs to show that the (capitalist) market sphere should be seen as a sphere that embodies social freedom. His opponents here are liberals and libertarians as well as Marxists. They see the market as the sphere of negative freedom where self-interested agents strategically interact in order to satisfy their interests. As a sphere of negative freedom, liberals and Marxists differ in their moral evaluation of the market. Liberals and libertarians think that the market is a desirable institutional sphere which guarantees their conception of freedom. For Marxists, who commit to the view that genuine freedom, understood as social freedom, is incompatible with negative or reflexive freedom, the market is morally problematic, as it undermines genuine freedom (see above). Honneth thinks that the key difference between him and his opponents is the question of the moral embeddedness of the market. In his eyes, neoclassical economists, liberals and libertarians, as well as Marxists, fail to appreciate moral embeddedness, and this failure leads them to mistakenly understand the market sphere in terms of negative freedom. Accordingly, much hinges on the question of whether the market is “morally embedded” or whether it is constituted merely by the strategic actions of self-interested actors whose social relationships are mediated by law. Honneth has to be careful here not to miss his mark, since liberals, libertarians and Marxists all view the market as morally embedded in some sense.

Liberals and Marxists alike recognise that the market requires laws and so depends on the legal sphere. This dependence is unproblematic for liberals and libertarians, since the legal sphere and market sphere both embody negative freedom. Liberals insist that the market sphere is independent of any thick conception of the good that may or may not be shared among participants. Market behaviour is steered not by ethical considerations but by self-interest, supply and demand (or by power and money). In fact, liberals will insist that the very independence of the market from an ethical sphere is one of its liberating features.<sup>56</sup> Capitalism has liberated us from the domination of feudal lords and constraining moral or religious customs. The free market allows everyone to participate equally, irrespective of family name, hometown, social status, religious belief, gender, sexuality or ethnicity. Everyone may freely sell their talent or product in order to buy products to satisfy whatever needs. It does not impose conceptions of the “good life” on its participants. The market merely regulates the distribution of goods. And the free market, according to liberal defenders, is the most efficient way to distribute goods.<sup>57</sup> The ethical neutrality of the market goes hand in hand with the neutrality of the liberal state and its legal sphere, which protects negative rights.

Honneth needs to show not only that the market is morally embedded but also that it must embody social freedom rather than individual freedom. He

needs to show that the members of a society support the institution on the grounds that it embodies social freedom. Honneth provides a mixture of historical analysis and philosophical argument. For example, he traces philosophical and intellectual debate about the impact of the market on moral norms and customs from the eighteenth century on. The focus is especially on aspects of the market that are perceived as moral failures or imperfections (for example, poverty).<sup>58</sup> These problems cause philosophers like Hegel to conclude that in order to function, the market relies on relations of solidarity, trust and beneficence—in other words, the very function of the market requires institutionalised forms of mutual affirmation of interdependence and social freedom. In Honneth, Hegel emerges as a normative functionalist who holds that the market “cannot be analysed outside of the framework of communicative obligations”.<sup>59</sup> In order to successfully “coordinate economic activities”, the market has to embody normative values beyond the idea of negative freedom. In the same vein, Honneth argues that the market must be able to command the normative support of its participants. Institutions gain support if their essential features contribute to the realisation of shared values—that is, freedom. If, for example, competition is an essential feature of the market, the competition must be seen to contribute to the realisation of (everyone’s) freedom in order for the institution of the market to command the support of its participants. For Hegel, thus, competition is legitimate only if it can reasonably be viewed as benefitting all.<sup>60</sup> However, such a justification need not make reference to social freedom. Liberals also justify competition in terms of its benefits for all. According to liberals, competition increases efficiency.

Honneth must somehow show that, quite generally, “the purely individual self-interest constitutive of market behaviour [e.g. competition] must be able to fulfil the normative condition that all participants can understand it as suitable means for the complementary realisation of their own respective purposes”.<sup>61</sup> He must show that in the market sphere the realisation of one individual’s interest is at the same time the condition or means of the realisation of another’s interest in such a way that participants recognise that their self-realisation and hence freedom depends on the self-realisation and freedom of the other. This awareness of mutuality, what Honneth deems the recognition “of each other as members of a cooperative community”,<sup>62</sup> is a distinctive feature of social freedom. In Hegel and Durkheim, this mutual recognition is mediated in specific institutions. In Hegel, corporations provide a discursive framework where members reflect on and negotiate self-interests in order to come to realise commonalities and dependencies and constraints together. A similar role is played by “occupational groups” in Durkheim. The discursive character of these institutions already requires participants to properly recognise each other and be able to change perspectives as well as reminding them of and thus affirming their relations of

solidarity.<sup>63</sup> Participants modify interests and form a consciousness of their dependence on each other's freedom. Honneth must identify a similar institution. In order to do so, he proceeds with a normative reconstruction of the spheres of consumption and of the labour market.

#### 6.4.1.1. *Sphere of Consumption*

Honneth can easily show that an idealised view of the sphere of consumption *can* be regarded as a sphere of social freedom: Ideally, consumers and producers mutually recognise each others' interest and recognise that the fulfilment of their interest depends on and goes hand in hand with the fulfilment of the others' interest. Consumers can only satisfy their desire for certain goods if they allow producers to make a living from producing and trading these goods, and producers can only make a living if they produce the goods consumers want and produce them in such a way that they are affordable.<sup>64</sup> But it is not sufficient for Honneth to show that an ideal of the sphere is compatible with social freedom. Since Honneth wants to avoid Kantian constructivism, his reconstruction must proceed from social reality, it must derive those values from plausible, legitimate actual institutions. He has to show that a consciousness of interdependence is institutionalised or that actual institutions in that sphere are a manifestation of this relation of mutual recognition.

Honneth is aware that the sphere of consumption looks very different from the above ideal. Again, Honneth provides plenty of historical analysis in order to support his claim that he focuses on the normatively motivated social struggles in this sphere. In other words, there are two ways in which Honneth can plausibly reconstruct the sphere of consumption as a sphere of social freedom, given the current state of that sphere. He can show that the best explanation of social struggles is to see them as normative reactions to the violation of normative expectations regarding the realisation of social freedom. Or he can show that the only way in which the sphere of consumption can function is by instituting social freedom mechanisms that positively affirm and raise awareness of our mutual interdependence—hence, institutions that are manifestations of relations of mutual recognition (of needs, subjective interests and dependency). In the latter case, however, Honneth has to describe the function of the market in such a way that his opponents—liberals, libertarians, neoclassical economists and Marxists—would agree. Honneth aims to show that social struggles in the sphere of consumption are motivated by violations of social freedom and so social freedom is the value institutions are meant to embody (it is what participants expect). His prime example is the so-called bread riots.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to changes in advertising, consumer behaviour changed.<sup>65</sup> The bourgeoisie increasingly desired status

symbols. Luxury goods which served as status symbols became more profitable to produce than cheap products that satisfied basic needs.<sup>66</sup> The result of profitable production of luxury goods for the wealthy was a lack of food, clothing and shelter at affordable prices for the poor. The so-called bread riots, which occurred in various countries, were a reaction to “unfair” pricing. Honneth reads bread riots as a moral reaction to a broken (moral) promise, in this case the promise to provide for the needs of all in recognition of the importance of each for the freedom of the other. If Honneth’s interpretation of the motives for the riots is correct, his claim that the sphere of consumption institutionalises the mutual recognition of mutual dependency gains in plausibility.

However, the bread riots could be explained just in terms of a conflict of interest. The moralistic vocabulary of “fair pricing” might be strategy. Equally, the reaction of the state apparatus in various countries in Western Europe, to guarantee provision of basic goods, ban false advertisement and so on,<sup>67</sup> can be read as conflict resolution in the name of protection of property, rather than a reflection of more substantive moral expectations. Governments merely respond to pressure from consumer cooperatives.<sup>68</sup>

We might, however, locate the embodiment of social freedom in those cooperatives. Groups of consumers come together, discuss interests, purchase products as collectives and then distribute products according to principles of fairness. Honneth argues that these cooperatives practically protect individual consumers from the machinations of the market; they are places of “moral socialisation”.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, they are discursive institutions that raise awareness at least of some kind of interdependence, and they settle normative expectations. But here again, they may just institutionalise individual freedom. We could plausibly regard consumer cooperatives as based on the self-interest of members, which happens to overlap with the self-interest of other members, and regard discourse as strategic (aimed at finding the best way to satisfy individual self-interest).

Hegel offers other reasons why the sphere of consumption must be regarded as a sphere of social freedom. The market, especially the sphere of consumption, is grounded on four normative choices that are not determined by market mechanisms. We have to decide which products and activities should qualify as commodities and be traded, how to settle prices for basic goods, what private needs should be satisfied through the market and in what way we buy and sell goods.<sup>70</sup> Honneth claims that these questions are settled with reference to social freedom or the “general satisfaction of needs”.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, ideally these questions are settled in discourse, so that all that are affected can accept the answers as reasonable. If this is correct and the market comes to be a form of manifestation of those choices, the market is an institutionalised sphere of social freedom. However, it is not clear that this is a descriptively accurate account of how those decisions are made. It seems at

least equally plausible to think that these decisions are made in relation to the self-interest of parties with negotiation power.

While Honneth's argument is not compelling, Honneth's account of the sphere of consumption (ideally) as a sphere of social freedom allows him to provide persuasive and insightful accounts of misdevelopments in the sphere. Honneth can successfully employ social freedom as a diagnostic tool. Failures to embody social freedom lead to consequences that undermine self-realisation. Increased consumerism, with the ideal of individuating oneself through consumption, combined with the absence of discursive mechanisms, leads to an “increasing atomisation of the consumer”,<sup>72</sup> who, being “atomised” is now powerless against the market. Honneth thinks that the introduction of more state welfare and more legal protection, or, more precisely, the way in which increases in welfare and legal protection have been realised, actually aids this atomisation because consumers do not feel the urgency to come together and create discursive spaces and institutions. Honneth sees possible solutions in isolated attempts of consumers to come together and put pressure on big businesses. The fair-trade movement and concerns about the treatment of non-human animals are examples of “ethical consumerism”, which manages to slightly affect the market.<sup>73</sup> However, in the end Honneth concludes that these movements are not big enough to reach significant potency. In fact, it is difficult to create big consumer movements because consumers themselves have different interests *qua* consumers. Honneth distinguishes between different groups of consumers—those who struggle to meet basic needs, ethical consumers and consumers of luxury goods—who are in conflict with each other. For example, given that ethical products are often expensive, those who struggle to meet basic needs simply cannot afford to become members of the second group.<sup>74</sup> Social freedom helps to identify atomisation as a problem and it can orient emancipatory action towards the realisation of social freedom. Thus, while he does not show that social freedom is what we expect our institutions to embody, he does show that social freedom is valuable with reference to our needs.

#### *6.4.1.2. The Labour Market as a Sphere of Social Freedom*

Honneth continues his normative reconstruction by examining the labour market. Again, it is fairly easy to give an account of how the labour market could be a sphere of social freedom, ideally. Through labour, individuals use their skill and (special) talents to contribute to the need satisfaction of others, thereby satisfying their own needs. More than satisfaction of needs, however, labour is also the source of self-esteem through esteem from others.<sup>75</sup> It is a sphere of mutual recognition where we recognise the valuable contribution individuals make through labour to the social good, thereby enabling the self-realisation of others and themselves. Social freedom can be institutionalised

in the labour market through organisations like unions and other labour movements. These must foster discourse and collective deliberation so that a collective awareness can be formed and collective interests be pursued. Moreover, these organisations should influence the working conditions, such that they present an institutionalised form of co-determination and hence self-determination. Insofar as workers, through collective action, can shape their working environment, this environment is self-determined and no longer alien and heteronomous. Apart from institutionalised co-determination, we—collectively—must also make sure that the work is such that individuals can regard it as valuable, so that labour can really be a source of (self-) esteem.<sup>76</sup>

While this is a plausible ideal, in terms of his project of a normative reconstruction Honneth meets similar difficulties as above. The reality of the sphere of labour suggests it is not a sphere of social freedom. Honneth engages in his historical reconstruction and traces the history of the capitalist labour market, along with various labour movements, to show that conflicts here are also conflicts about the failure of the sphere of labour to embody social freedom.

Consequently, Honneth focuses on various labour movements and struggles to improve conditions of labour to show that they are best explained as reactions to the failure of the institutions in the sphere of labour to embody social freedom. Noteworthy is a critique of the organisation and inhumane nature of labour similar to Marx's critique, which motivates struggles for workers' rights.<sup>77</sup> Those rights, however, protect individual freedom and ultimately lead to a fragmentation of the worker movement. Legal subjects stand alone.<sup>78</sup> Honneth is particularly interested in the nature and history of unions, which develop during these struggles.<sup>79</sup> Unions could present the kind of institutions that provide discursive frameworks and allow members to become aware of one another as mutually enabling each other's freedom. They could thus embody social freedom. Indeed, unions are successful in forcing an institutionalisation of "co-determination", better recognition and even discursive mechanisms which allow workers to shape their work environment.<sup>80</sup> But the history of unions is also characterised by increased fragmentation; the "segmentation of the labour market"<sup>81</sup>—the division into a high-skilled, protected and well-recognised core and low-skilled, unprotected peripheral work—means that unions cannot push for structural reforms because the interests of their members are diverse and conflicting. That segmentation has this kind of impact on unions suggests that rather than being institutions of social freedom, they are institutions of individual freedom. Members join for strategic reasons, to better further their private interests, not to fight for social freedom.

Since the 1990s the labour market has become increasingly deregulated, meaning that there is more and more precarious work, less job security even

for high-skill professions. Where there is work, wages have fallen—sometimes to such a degree that it is impossible for individuals and/or families to survive on their income from labour. At the same time, globalisation and international competition have led to tax breaks for multinational corporations, meaning overall states have less money to spend on welfare. Generally, then, Honneth diagnoses a loss of opportunity to satisfy subsistence needs through labour as well as a sharp decline in recognition, or esteem, for one's labour—evidenced by falling wages in a context where wages are the currency of esteem. What is problematic for Honneth is that there is no “collective outrage”.<sup>82</sup> Rather, Honneth concedes, individuals seem to regard themselves as responsible for their own precarious work situation. He speaks of an “individualisation of responsibility”.<sup>83</sup> To him, however, this is linked to a now widely accepted interpretation of the market sphere as one of individual freedom, an internalisation of liberal values.<sup>84</sup> There is now a need for “self-marketing” and “strategic self-optimisation” added to a perception of society as a “network of actors concerned solely with their own benefit”,<sup>85</sup> rather than a community of individuals who enable each other to self-realise. In other words, the mistaken belief that the role of the labour market is to embody *individual* freedom, the liberal creed, is the source of phenomena that constitute social pathologies in the group of paradoxes of individualisation described in the previous chapter.

Thus, Honneth manages to explain the features that prevent self-realisation in terms of failures to embody social freedom. Honneth also insists that our current state of affairs and the attitude that the market is an institution solely of individual freedom are a misdevelopment and also insists that it presents a disruption to a “discontinuous and yet easily recognizable progress of social reforms”<sup>86</sup> ultimately aiming at social freedom. He thinks that social reforms cannot be explained away plausibly as superfluous or merely a means of pacifying workers; they can only be understood properly as the progressive realisation of social freedom. It seems clear that Honneth's perspective on social freedom allows him to come up with a highly critical diagnosis of the current state and allows him to formulate solutions. However, his claim that the labour market is a sphere of social freedom, and that social freedom is the value that is normatively reconstructed from the sphere, does not seem compelling. It seems equally plausible to regard the labour market as a sphere of individual freedom.

Honneth's argument falls short. Liberal approaches to the market can account for the institutions in the sphere of the labour market and for social struggles. Moreover, liberal explanations seem to resonate with individuals' intuitions about the sphere. This does not mean that we are left without a critical stance: There are two possibilities. First, we might still overall want to say that the economic sphere, while being a sphere of individual freedom, must be compatible with, and hence be in line with (framed by), social

freedom, realised in the private and political spheres (much as Hegel claimed). Alternatively, even as a sphere of individual liberty, we can criticise deregulation for curbing the individual freedom of some. Or we might regard Honneth's reconstruction as a suggestion that we should begin to demand that the market embody social freedom. While Honneth fails to show that the market is an institution of social freedom, he can offer a narrative that shows that an organisation of the market as embodiment of social freedom is attractive and perhaps possible. This might open him to the charge of Kantian constructivism; however, he might base an argument for the need of the market sphere to embody social freedom on cognitive needs, grounded in his philosophical anthropology.

One should not underestimate the critical potency Honneth's interpretation of the market has as (properly) a sphere of social freedom. Honneth's demands range from co-determination of the nature and structure of work to a "humanisation of labour" along a Marxian idea of humane labour (meaningful labour that appeals to human capacities and does not exclusively consist in mechanical repetition) and living wages.<sup>87</sup> As Jütten correctly points out, these demands amount to significant restrictions on the capitalist structure of the market. Hence, they support Honneth's argument for a form of market socialism. In other words, Honneth does not aim to show that the capitalist structure of the market embodies social freedom but that the promise of markets is social freedom. However, given that social freedom requires the above kinds of restrictions and reforms it seems that in order to fulfil its promise the market cannot be a capitalist market for Honneth.<sup>88</sup>

#### **6.4.2. Democracy**

The last sphere of Honneth's normative reconstruction is the democratic sphere as "embodiment of social freedom".<sup>89</sup> The democratic sphere must be a "social space in which citizens form generally acceptable beliefs through deliberative discussion, beliefs that form the principles to be obeyed by the legislature in accordance with the rule of law".<sup>90</sup> Honneth and Hegel both identify the democratic sphere (or the state in Hegel) as providing the overall framework for all spheres of ethical life—that is, the family, the market and the state. The spheres interact with each other, and injustices or social pathologies (that derive from, for example, the absolutisation of individual freedom) in the sphere of intimate relations and the sphere of the market will have consequences in the democratic sphere. In fact, Honneth claims that unless social freedom is efficiently embodied in the other spheres, "democratic will-formation in an unforced and unrestricted manner will be absent".<sup>91</sup> However, in the democratic sphere we, as citizens, can take the necessary steps to ensure the other two spheres maximally embody or facilitate social freedom. For example, it is within the sphere of democratic legis-

lation that we might find ways to limit competitive market influences. To this end, we might decide that some institutions (e.g. those providing education and health) be removed from the sphere of commercialisation and profit maximisation and become public institutions. Thus, it is in the democratic sphere that we ultimately determine our social environment and decide on the rules and principles that shall govern our life together.

Honneth's normative reconstruction of the democratic institutions is Habermasian. It favours a deliberative democracy in which all those affected by decisions concerning collective actions and social life should be free to participate as equals in public deliberations. Public deliberations are guided by principles of communicative relations or communicative recognition. They inform parliamentary discussion and action in constitutional states. Honneth focuses on two components of the democratic sphere: the democratic public sphere, where individuals come together to deliberate and find a consensus on the principles that guide the communal life, and the constitutional state or state authorities, whose task it is to "respect public will formation",<sup>92</sup> to protect and expand the public sphere and to implement the results of public deliberation.

#### *6.4.2.1. The Democratic Public Sphere*

In his normative reconstruction of the democratic public sphere, Honneth follows Habermas to some extent and traces the public sphere back to the salons, coffee houses and social clubs of the eighteenth century.<sup>93</sup> They play an important role for the formation of class-specific collective consciousness. However, inequality within this early public sphere conflicts with the ideals of universal human rights of freedom and equality of all (male) citizens, the ideals of the French Revolution, which eventually result in the emergence of political rights: rights to assemble, form association and the right to vote. While these rights still depend on socioeconomic status and exclude minorities and marginalised majorities,<sup>94</sup> Honneth argues that political rights are special because they "were not addressed to the individual as an individual, but to the citizen as a member of a democratic community of rights".<sup>95</sup> In other words, these rights can only be understood in terms of social freedom. They are valuable rights only if we appreciate that our self-realisation depends on the self-realisation of others in our community and we understand that we have to find ways to coordinate our collective actions such that we can all live fulfilling lives. Political rights are an institutionalisation of "an idea of freedom . . . that no longer permitted a merely individualistic interpretation. Instead, individual citizens were to achieve their new freedom to influence political legislation by forming an intersubjectively examined opinion, in discursive exchange and dispute with other citizens".<sup>96</sup> This public sphere that is now guaranteed by rights is a manifestation of the realisation

that we are all interdependent and hence need to find a common ground to govern communal life. The discursive sphere also allows each of us to assume roles of listeners and speakers and so institutionalises a new kind of recognition of each other as “equally entitled citizens”.<sup>97</sup>

Honneth’s argument about the public sphere as a sphere of social freedom consists of three strands: first is his interpretation of political rights as embodying social freedom (above); second, he aims to show that we must exercise communicative recognition in the form of public discourse in the public sphere; third, the fact that political and social cooperation require solidarity among all members of the demos suggests that the democratic public sphere is a sphere of social freedom.

The discursive requirement is linked to the epistemic and a moral value of the democratic public sphere. The epistemic value of the democratic public sphere stems from the quantity and quality of information it provides about how possible choices and decisions affect a variety of people. The more individuals contribute to the public sphere, the more information will be available. For Durkheim, the state is an “organ of social thought”.<sup>98</sup> Dewey conceives of the public sphere as a “type of experimental research community”.<sup>99</sup> In order to fulfil its epistemic role, the public sphere needs to include ideally all those affected by political decisions, and it needs to promote equal participation and mutual recognition of participants as subjects of knowledge and of their information.<sup>100</sup> Genuine reports of experience, needs and concerns should not be neglected on grounds of class, sex, gender or ethnicity.

The democratic public sphere can only fulfil its epistemic role insofar as it also successfully embodies social freedom: Only if “communicative conditions” are established so that individuals participate freely and as equals, interchangeably occupying roles of speakers and listeners in public debates, can we gain the necessary information.<sup>101</sup> In addition to free and equal participation, Dewey thinks that it takes a certain skill, an “art” to communicate in the public in such a way as to facilitate and stimulate the “creative intelligence” of other participants.<sup>102</sup> In the art of presenting social issues, the media, of course, play a key role. The media must inform the public about points of social concern; they are also responsible for informing participants about the contributions that other participants make and so on.

The last requirement, solidarity, is problematic. While we might agree that some bond among members of a society is necessary in order for us to be willing to forfeit advantage for the benefit of others and to engage in the kind of cooperation necessary for a political community, it is hard to find criteria that could ground solidarity between members of a political community. In his historical analysis, Honneth discusses solidarity based on class, nationality and “constitutional patriotism”. The problem with original class-based solidarity is that it is too restrictive and does not extend to all members of a society. In order to overcome class, and so avoid the creation or persistence

of “milieus”, the idea of a national community emerges.<sup>103</sup> The creation of the nation-state means that the demos, those who are members of the community, is clearly delineated—according to Honneth. Advances in media technology allow the national press to inform people even in remote regions about complex issues and ongoing debates, and dependence on information provided by the press increases.<sup>104</sup> The public sphere’s dependence on both nationhood and the media is problematic.

The creation of national identity and national solidarity involves identifying features that are shared between all those that should be included into the national community and not shared with those that should be excluded and that can motivate affective bonds of trust and care between members of a society. Shared history, shared language and shared culture are all features that fail the criteria of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>105</sup> In the absence of other criteria, the nation-state’s need for a shared feature that can ground affective bonds of solidarity leads to racism. Honneth discusses the Dreyfus affair and especially Durkheim’s reaction to it at some length.<sup>106</sup> In response to the anti-Semitism unleashed in the Dreyfus affair, Durkheim formulates an early version of “constitutional patriotism”, later pursued and refined by Habermas. Constitutional patriotism means that we identify with the values expressed in our (written or unwritten) national constitutions. These expressions are particular interpretations of universal principles. Patriotism is ultimately grounded in some form of universalism. At the same time, patriotism has an affective dimension that motivates individuals to sacrifice time to participate in public debate and be prepared to find compromises. However, while constitutional patriotism might constitute a theoretical solution, it does not reflect social reality. It is not reconstructed from the “institution” of solidarity, but formulated abstractly as an ideal.

To sum up: Social freedom is realised in the public sphere because different individuals, who are interdependent, come together to understand and deliberate about the consequences of their social actions under conditions of mutual recognition of each other as free and equal subjects of knowledge and social agents.<sup>107</sup> The more inclusive the public sphere is, the more insight participants have in the effects of their actions. Insofar as the public sphere is a sphere of mutual recognition of interdependence, in which each participant recognises the freedom of the other as a precondition of one’s own freedom, it institutionalises relations of mutual recognition and hence realises social freedom. In total, Honneth identifies five conditions the democratic public sphere has to fulfil in order to be a sphere of social freedom: First, political rights must legally guarantee that individuals can participate in public discourse. Second, the public sphere needs to be inclusive in the sense that it needs to facilitate equal participation across class, sex, gender, race, age, religious, cultural or ethnic differences. Third, the public sphere requires media that fulfil the task of informing the public in such a way as to stimulate

critical thought and debate and “creative intelligence”. This means that the media have to communicate in an accessible and precise manner. Fourth, for the public sphere to function and for public debates to take place and be open to all, individuals must be willing to sacrifice their time and energy in the “menial” tasks of organising and promoting events and meetings and generally engage in those actions that will constitute public deliberation. Fifth, the members of a society and participants in the public sphere must be in relations of solidarity (care and trust) so as to be prepared to forgo advantage for the benefit of others.<sup>108</sup>

From these conditions we can see various ways in which the public sphere can fail to be a sphere of freedom. The public sphere could be over-exclusive either through formal exclusion or informally. The media could fail in their role, or there could be widespread apathy so that members of the public are not prepared to engage in public debates or organise or promote them. In reality, the public sphere shows failures for all five conditions. Honneth, yet again, offers a thorough and insightful account of the various misdevelopments. With reference to his account of social freedom, we can understand, for example, political apathy (see next chapter). Honneth also offers a critique of the media, which is motivated by the media’s role of informing and co-creating a (transnational) public sphere.<sup>109</sup> The specific type of criticisms (for example, the self-referentiality of the media) which can result in fictions—sensationalism as a result of a drive to maximise profit—helps to understand the current distrust towards the media and towards experts as such. We can understand the media’s role in the fragmentation of the public sphere<sup>110</sup> and their erosive effect on public discourse.<sup>111</sup> Honneth’s account of the democratic public sphere here is powerful enough to be able to explain very recent developments as pathological. He manages to provide a narrative of the public sphere as potentially a sphere of social freedom. His position here is more convincing than his reconstruction of the market.

However, it is still based on idealisations. The early public spheres, the salons, arguably did not arise out of the kind of concerns that characterise social freedom, the realisation that the freedom of the other is the prerequisite of my own freedom. It seems plausible that the early public spheres arose out of self-interested individuals discovering that they had a common interest (to wrangle power from the aristocracy) and thus they cooperated out of strategic self-interest to realise individual freedom. All the struggles to include other groups (workers, women, ethnic minorities) can plausibly be read as self-interested. And of course, faced with violent struggle, it is in the interest of those in power to keep the peace and so extend as many rights as necessary. In other words, we can explain the history of this sphere in terms of individual freedom, and it is possible that political rights are grounded in individual, negative freedom only.

Moreover, one might object that Honneth's account suffers somewhat from his silence as to who should be included in the public discourse. Should we include citizens only? Should we include refugees? Should refugees and all those residing in a state territory receive citizen rights? Having said that, the drive to greater inclusion, together with the Deweyan epistemic commitments, seems to suggest an inclusion of all those who are affected by decisions, even indirectly, as we will see below. This in turn would throw doubt on the plausibility of national (rather than transnational or even global) public spheres. It would also, in practice, complicate the achievement of equal and free participation of all—and the question of consensus. In his defence, Honneth is aware of the need for and practical difficulties with transnational publics. Similarly, he is aware of gross inequalities and their effects. He tackles issues of inclusion, diversity and fragmentation of the public sphere—somewhat—in his reconstruction of the democratic state (below). The drive towards transnationalism will be elaborated in the discussion of TIOS, and the potential for a recognition-theoretical transnationalism will be assessed in chapter 7.

#### 6.4.2.2. *The Democratic Constitutional State*

Ideally, the democratic constitutional state implements the will of the people as formed in the democratic public sphere (which also means that, ideally, there is one will of the people). Direct democracies proceed through plebiscites. Representative democracies, in which the public opinions are “made more rational” in parliamentary debates, implement “improved versions” of the will of the people.<sup>112</sup> In Habermasian deliberative democracies, the results of public deliberation are translated into “binding resolutions . . . by the political authorities in charge”.<sup>113</sup> This implementation of the public will must be unbiased. The state authority should not act in the interest of selected groups or act on the preference of value orientations, other than the commitment to the principles underlying the democratic constitutional state—that is, the maximisation and protection of freedom and equality (as equal participation). Moreover, state authority must facilitate relations of mutual recognition among members. The results of public deliberation, in the form of consensus (or at least compromise) among all members, are provisional or open to change. The state here also has specific functions; it is responsible for providing, protecting and expanding the democratic public sphere so that, eventually, all those affected by decisions and choices made in public debate can participate as equals and have maximum freedom, with participation that is un-coerced and (potentially) sufficiently informed.<sup>114</sup>

Honneth thinks that this conception of the purpose of the democratic state and political authority allows us to identify three areas where state power can be abused: First, the state can fail to sufficiently protect or expand the public

sphere. In those cases, either some members are (illegitimately) excluded from public deliberation or they cannot participate as equals or they cannot participate freely. Second, political authorities can violate the neutrality condition and be partial (possibly systematically partial) in the implementation of the results of public discourse. Lastly, the state can directly or indirectly influence public debate—for example, through media. If any of these abuses of power occurs, the state fails in its task to secure social freedom by realising the freedom to self-legislate.

In his reconstruction, Honneth focuses on the history of such failures; progress is seen as resulting from recognitive struggles motivated by those failures.<sup>115</sup> Honneth shows that remedying the exclusion and under-representation found in the early European democracies eventually leads to fragmentation and the rise in nationalism.<sup>116</sup> For Honneth, the Weimar Republic is one story of failure which allows him to draw more general conclusions about the dynamics of misdevelopments in this sphere.

In the Weimar Republic, increased political rights for more and more groups and a better representation of the various groups in the form of parties and other interest groups leads to a fragmentation of the political sphere. This fragmentation is problematic because without some degree of “political integration” or “background culture”, it is difficult to find consensus among participants. In addition to fragmentation, the Weimar Republic has trouble with the demand of state neutrality. According to Marxists, the state is structurally biased towards property owners and the interests of companies. For them, this bias is intrinsic to the structure of liberal democracies.<sup>117</sup> Both the fragmentation of the public sphere and the question of state neutrality go some way in explaining the rise of extremist parties in Germany.<sup>118</sup> According to Honneth, some of these issues have reappeared in a different guise today and are responsible for the widespread “disenchantment” with politics.<sup>119</sup> Current liberal democracies suffer from the dangers of narrow nationalism and the threat of fragmentation. There is now a tension between a new, liberal constitutional attitude and old nationalist attitudes. The response to increased cultural and religious diversity in some Western European countries is a shift towards nationalism.<sup>120</sup> Nationalism, on the one hand, and diversity, on the other, have different but equally negative effects on the public sphere—nationalism because it aims at exclusion and prevents equal participation, and diversity because there is a lack of political integration.

In addition to this new fragmentation of the public sphere, Honneth describes how many liberal states have slowly removed economic policy from the public sphere to “liberal corporations”.<sup>121</sup> By the 1980s, the economy in Western liberal democracies was stagnating, revenues decreased and less money was available for welfare. At the same time, various trade agreements made it possible for industry to relocate to “cheaper” and hence more attractive countries. In order to prevent “capital flight”, states offered tax breaks

and deregulated labour. This situation led to (a widespread perception of) a tension between capitalism and democracy. Additionally, liberal corporations were increasingly replaced by lobbying, informal secret negotiations and secret deals between industry and government. Governments' economic decisions now lack transparency and are constantly suspected of being directed against the democratic public to serve the interest of industry. This leads to growing "disenchantment". The disenchantment manifests itself in decreased political participation. It is not a form of apathy but a normatively laden reaction to misdevelopments in the democratic sphere, according to Honneth. Overall, it seems Honneth's account of the genesis of misdevelopments from failures to embody social freedom is persuasive.

Honneth offers a Habermasian conception of the democratic constitutional state, which is beset by the same problems other Habermasian accounts must face.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, Honneth specifically must link this conception to his project of normative reconstruction. For his purposes, it is not sufficient that Honneth manages to provide a plausible narrative, centred on the tasks of the state and possible areas of failure. One could tell an equally plausible story, with an equally good explanation of the history, from a very different perspective. From the outset of this section of FR, Honneth is aware that he is faced with a particular difficulty: it is possible to explain the genesis, history and survival of the institution of the constitutional democratic state in non-normative, "realist" terms. "Political realism", of course, is a wide-ranging term that seems to cover a whole host of mutually contradictory positions; the position that Honneth has in mind here holds that what matters to the state (political authorities) is the increase of power, including the power to exercise social control.<sup>123</sup> According to this particular version of political realism, the constitutional democratic state, with laws to regulate most aspects of the lives of individuals (including laws pertaining to family structures, reproduction etc.), is a soft but effective means of controlling the populace. Honneth's defence consists in pointing out that the realist conception of the nature of the state does not allow us to normatively distinguish between the soft control that democracies exert and the "hard" touch approach of fascist states (e.g. the Nazi regime). Thus, rather than relying on the compellingness of his normative reconstruction, Honneth appeals to the critical advantages of the "normative perspective" over the realist perspective.<sup>124</sup> According to Honneth, the normative perspective allows us to identify and call out areas of power abuse and to describe misdevelopments. Honneth's position here requires more argument than he offers. It is true that the kind of realism Honneth has in mind cannot appeal to principles that are intrinsic to the political sphere in order to criticise fascist regimes. However, that does not mean that a realist cannot—on the basis of extrinsic principles—condemn fascist regimes.<sup>125</sup> So the appeal to the critical value of the normative perspective only works if we want a specific type of immanent

critique, or if we think that we must be able to criticise the use of state power from within the principles of the state. It is not clear that Honneth can provide good reasons here.

Honneth offers a further argument for his normative perspective—his account of social struggles. But as we have seen in the previous sections, social struggles can be interpreted either as motivated by self-interest or as normatively motivated by considerations of social freedom or negative freedom.

Overall, the reconstruction of the political sphere as a sphere of social freedom is only marginally more compelling than Honneth's reconstruction of the market sphere. However, Honneth provides a plausible diagnosis of the current state of democracy in Western European countries. He manages to give a good explanation of the perceived “political apathy” (the “disenchantment”) and the reasons for growing distrust in state authority and the media. Honneth correctly identifies the dangers of nationalism and also indicates the threat of a new rise of right-wing extremism because of problems pertaining to the lack of public integration and distrust.

The powerful explanations of social pathologies and misdevelopments afforded by Honneth's account may ultimately outweigh the reconstructive weaknesses. Moreover, the account allows Honneth to formulate practical solutions and guides for such formulations. In the last section I will discuss Honneth's idea of socialism as an example of the kind of reforms the Critical Theory based on social freedom might demand.

## 6.5. A RECOGNITION-THEORETICAL CONCEPTION OF SOCIALISM

The aim of Honneth's latest book is a revival of socialism as an idea that is able to galvanise individuals. He justifies his project with reference to conflicting phenomena: the urgent need for socialism and the widespread disillusionment with socialist ideas. Substantial dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic conditions in contemporary (Western) societies and widespread indignation is accompanied by resigned silence and disenchantment with political utopias. Honneth's aim is to formulate a view of ethical life that can motivate transformative action. *The Idea of Socialism* can also be read as a response to reservations about the scope of the social critique presented in FR mentioned in the first section.<sup>126</sup> Honneth's socialism requires substantial social changes, which are justified in terms of the immanent critique outlined in FR.

The project of the “revival” of socialism proceeds in three stages: First, Honneth discerns the normative basis for early socialism; next, he identifies three erroneous assumptions of early socialism which require correction. These corrections amount to a reconceived socialism, which he will outline

in a third step. Honneth will argue that this new socialism shares the same normative basis as early socialism, although he concedes that it might take an unrecognisable form.

### 6.5.1. The Normative Basis: From the French Revolution to Social Freedom

Following a historical overview of the term *socialism* from its early origins in the seventeenth century to Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon (Henri de Saint-Simon), Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, whose followers were called “socialists”, Honneth briefly analyses their different ideas about how to empower the working classes.<sup>127</sup> Honneth claims that despite their differences, all three share a commitment to the normative promises of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality and Solidarity.<sup>128</sup> Thus, in Honneth, early socialists aim to realise freedom, solidarity and equality. Social changes are necessary because under conditions of capitalism, the three principles seem to be incompatible; specifically, freedom and solidarity seem to conflict with each other. According to Honneth, “equality” is not a concern for early socialism because it is seen as being fully realised in the formal equality provided by law.<sup>129</sup> The target of socialist critique, from early socialism to contemporary theories, is the liberal-capitalist conception of freedom.<sup>130</sup>

As we have seen above, the problem with the liberal conception of freedom is that freedom is understood mostly in legal and exclusively in individualist terms. It is the (negative) freedom to egoistically pursue one’s own private interests. In economic terms, this translates into the (legally guaranteed) freedom to amass property. The “private egoism” that underlies this conception of freedom is the root of the competitiveness in the economic sphere. Pace Hegel, competitiveness is not seen as benefitting all but as undermining the possibility of solidarity. The aim of socialist theory is to modify the conception of freedom such that freedom and solidarity (or “fraternity”) are compatible.<sup>131</sup> In other words, socialist critique aims at showing that freedom should be understood as social freedom.<sup>132</sup> As outlined above, in social freedom, we complement each other and realise that, in order to be free, we have to work for one another. Drawing on Marx, Honneth claims that the social freedom the socialists are concerned with is one in which we mutually recognise and affirm each other’s needs and our mutual dependence on each other. Against Marx, Honneth still holds that the social freedom of socialism is compatible with individual freedom.

### **6.5.2. The Errors of Early Socialism**

Honneth identifies three assumptions that have traditionally been regarded as intrinsic to socialism but which are responsible for the failure of socialism today.

First, early socialists focus exclusively on the economic sphere as both the sphere of the cause of failures to realise freedom and the sphere of future emancipation.<sup>133</sup> This narrow focus on just one sphere of action as a sphere of freedom has various problematic consequences. For one, socialists cannot make sense of the importance and value of individual freedom (in other spheres) within social freedom. Moreover, they cannot capture non-economic ways of realising social freedom—for example, in and through democracies. This means that socialists are ill equipped to identify and explain some pervasive misdevelopments and social pathologies in other spheres of action, which might partially explain the unease with which socialists relate to other social movements (e.g. feminist and anti-racist movements).

Second, early socialists see themselves as a “reflexive organ” of an already existing movement.<sup>134</sup> Socialism as theory is seen as the expression of an already existing desire for emancipation of the oppressed working class. This assumption has important implications for the relationship between theory and praxis—that is, the standing of socialist theory as “merely” representing pre-theoretical social interests in emancipation.

Third, traditionally socialism is committed to historicism—that is, the idea that capitalism necessarily destroys itself and socialism is a historical necessity.<sup>135</sup> The commitment to the historical necessity of socialism is conceived of either in terms of a “technological determinism” or in terms of the inevitable, impeding revolution of the proletariat. Historicism is also coupled with a belief that socialists know what form socialism will take, and it comes at the price of the possibility of “experimentation”.

### **6.5.3. Honneth’s New Socialism**

Honneth thinks that it is important that a revised kind of socialism does not just dismiss these three assumptions, instead replacing them with more plausible tenets. Commitments to the historical necessity of socialism and the connection to pre-social interests in emancipation play an especially important role in distinguishing socialism from other “merely” normative theories.

First, Honneth argues for a socialism that allows “experimentation”, as opposed to a socialism based on notions of inevitability. Although we can understand the aim of socialism as the (institutional) realisation of social freedom, Honneth insists that we have to admit that there are several ways in which we could structure our society. Apart from the idea of a “planned” economy, we might also be able to institutionalise social freedom in a Smith-

ian market society or in an economy that is governed by the free association of producers or an economy that is controlled by democratic states where democratic will-formation may be one way in which we practice social freedom.<sup>136</sup> Honneth claims that in order to decide which social structure is best able to realise social freedom, we have to experiment; in other words, this decision cannot be made from the armchair or *a priori*. Experimentation requires a standard by which we can judge a set of changes to be improvement. Here, Honneth draws on Dewey's theory of communication, specifically the idea that communication between individuals releases (and creates new) potentials. Barriers to communication and exclusion from communication are harmful—both morally and epistemically. Those who are excluded from communication stagnate and information they could contribute to others is lost. Moreover, especially on the sociopolitical level, those who are excluded from discourse are also not able to self-determine. Social orders, but also cultural orders (of interpretation, for example) that result from such discourse, are experienced as heteronomous by those excluded. Progress is then measured in terms of the abolition of barriers to communication.<sup>137</sup> Honneth also accepts Dewey's idea that those individuals who are excluded from communication will always strive for inclusion. The struggle to overcome barriers to communication is an engine of progress.<sup>138</sup> The struggle for inclusion in communication is a struggle for recognition, and it forms one important link to Honneth's recognition theory.<sup>139</sup> By providing this understanding of progress, and thus introducing a tool to help us judge different (possible) social changes, Honneth has at the same time provided a normative basis for the experimental approach itself: If we understand socialism as aiming to realise social freedom by expanding the scope of interaction and communication between individuals through struggles for recognition, then only an experimental approach will do justice to the individual freedom of self-determination, because the experimental approach and not historical determinism can respond to the various demands concrete individuals actually make for inclusion.

The normative ideal of overcoming barriers to communication can serve as a guide for future developments and as a standard of critique of current institutions. Honneth holds that those individuals who are excluded from communication are driven to fight for inclusion. Thus Honneth's socialism can understand itself as the theoretical expression of an already existing, pre-theoretical emancipatory interest, which—as we will see below—is no longer limited to one class. Honneth emphasises the critical potency of his theory in contrast to “mainstream” (Rawlsian) theories, which cannot understand themselves as thus linked to pre-theoretical emancipatory interests.<sup>140</sup>

Honneth holds that socialism begins with the understanding that the normative promises of the French Revolution cannot be realised in a social order that pitches individuals and groups against each other in the egoistic and

competitive pursuit of private interest.<sup>141</sup> He demands that critics respond to the structures that prevent the realisation of social freedom with a thorough critical analysis of the key tenets of capitalism. Honneth suggests that—within the experimental approach—socialists should relentlessly criticise key assumptions of capitalist theory. For example, they should question whether capitalism is inevitable in market economies or whether other forms of market economy are possible; whether the labour market should be organised around the principle of incentives, given that we lack empirical evidence that incentives make us work harder; whether profits in the financial market, which do not contribute (and at times actually work against) industry, are compatible with other capitalist ideas (productive efficiency) and so on.<sup>142</sup> The outcome of such criticisms is the discovery of alternative ways of organising society, the removal of individual obstacles to social freedom. It is a gradual social reform rather than a revolutionary transformation. Nonetheless, changes are likely to be substantial.

Partly in order to guide future transformations, the experimental approach should not only provide new alternatives but also create an “archive” of past experiments. This archive should contain information about various debates as well as various means that were “tried out” in the past.<sup>143</sup> In addition to an archive, socialism also needs to gain and maintain an overview of current “experiments” in different parts of the world. Presumably, though Honneth does not spell this out, such experiments should be observed and evaluated as well as supported.

The shift to experimental socialism, based on struggles for inclusion, also has implications for the other (erroneous) assumptions. As mentioned above, demands to inclusion cannot really be restricted to the economic sphere alone, and it cannot be restricted to one specific class or movement but must include marginalised groups and individuals in all spheres. The exclusive focus of socialists on the economic sphere has led to several undesirable consequences. On the one hand, understanding social freedom merely in terms of economic relations has meant, according to Honneth’s analysis, that the relevance and potentials of the democratic and private spheres for freedom have been overlooked, and so the impact of domination in those spheres has been ignored. According to Honneth, excluding the other spheres of action puts socialism at a “sociological disadvantage”<sup>144</sup> because it is now less well equipped to explain social phenomena than its competitors (for example, liberalism). Moreover, the narrow focus also leads to other theoretical and practical deficits. Honneth claims that it is due to the exclusive focus on the economic sphere that socialists cannot cooperate with “liberal republicans”. The aim of liberal republicans is to institutionalise and expand social freedom in the political sphere by, for example, pressing for increased participation of everyone in legislative concerns and the creation of institutions for public will formation.<sup>145</sup> These are concerns socialists should share. Similar-

ly, Honneth explains the uneasy relationship between socialists and various feminist movements with the former's disregard of the importance of the private and family sphere. According to Honneth, because of a focus on the conditions of production, socialists can only understand feminist concerns very narrowly (in terms of economic arrangements) but cannot understand how domination in the spheres of "love, marriage and family" prevent the realisation of social freedom. In line with Honneth's analysis here is the marginalisation of Marxist feminists (especially those interested in combining Marx and psychoanalysis) in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>146</sup>

The revised Honnethian socialism should roughly follow Hegel's structure of the "ethical life" and recognise the private, political and economic as distinct spheres of action. While highly interdependent, they nevertheless each present their own particular possibilities for and obstacles to the realisation of social freedom.<sup>147</sup> Honneth also now adopts the notion of an "organism" to explain the relationship that should hold between the three spheres.<sup>148</sup> Accordingly, the three spheres should interact in such a way that they each contribute to the realisation of social freedom in their own as well as the other spheres—the realisation of social freedom thus is the overall purpose or end of social reproduction.<sup>149</sup> This interaction between the spheres is to be steered by the public, by citizens—not workers. The idea of the public as the steering body, and hence as the body that chooses which changes to institutionalise, and so on, follows from both the inclusion of the political and private sphere and the idea of progress in terms of the removal of barriers to communication.<sup>150</sup> What we get now is a view of socialism that combines Habermasian discourse ethics and deliberative democracy with recognition theory—on the basis of a Hegelian view of society.

The idea of the public as "steering body" has implications for the scope of this socialism. While socialists should still have cosmopolitan ambitions, especially given that globalisation means that some changes in the economic sphere require transnational action, there are several obstacles to the realisation of such ambitions: To some extent, the institutionalisation of social freedom takes place through laws and the creation of constitutional rights, but laws and constitutions often operate within states; there are only some exceptions (and even in international law, the interpretation and enforcement is often left to states). Honneth holds that the formation of a public is not restricted to the borders of nation-states, but he thinks that a public must be constituted by individuals that share "normative sensibilities".<sup>151</sup>

To sum up, then, Honneth proposes various changes to traditional socialism: He replaces historicism with an experimental approach and shifts the focus from the economic sphere to all spheres, with special focus on the political sphere. The agents of emancipation are citizens. The aim is the realisation of social freedom, possibly within a market economy.

## 6.6. INEQUALITY AND DOMINATION IN HONNETH'S SOCIALISM

There are various problems with Honneth's revived socialism. For reasons of brevity, I will here only focus on the question of equality.<sup>152</sup> One might worry about Honneth's apparent disregard for equality, a disregard he claims to also find in the early socialists. As mentioned above, Honneth suggests that the early socialists focus exclusively on freedom and solidarity because they might have been satisfied with formal equality. However, with this brief explanation of the attitudes of early socialists, "equality" disappears from Honneth's view too. My concern is that socialism ought to be concerned with equality if it really is concerned with freedom and solidarity.

Neglecting (substantial) equality is problematic for various reasons. One, we could plausibly suggest a link between inequality and competitiveness. If inequality is one of the causes of competitiveness, and competitiveness is an obstacle to solidarity and thus to the realisation of social freedom, then inequality poses a practical problem for Honneth. Quite apart from the question of competitiveness, economic inequality leads to asymmetrical dependencies and, hence, power asymmetries.<sup>153</sup> In line with both worries, we might think that inequality leads to inequality in terms of access to recognition and thus to recognition hierarchies. Given the importance of recognition, these hierarchical relations can very quickly turn into structures of domination.<sup>154</sup>

It seems that the toleration of inequality and competitiveness are linked to the acceptance of a Hegelian account of social freedom where negative freedom is regarded as compatible. Arguably, negative freedom is at the root of the kind of competitiveness that undermines solidarity and co-determines inequality. It seems, thus, that the striking and—at least *prima facie*—problematic neglect of equality in Honneth is linked to his Hegelian commitment.

## 6.7. CONCLUSION

Overall, Honneth's idea of socialism can be read as a continuation of FR. In both FR and TIOS, Honneth bases his criticism of capitalism on a Hegelian rather than Marxian view of social freedom. The left-wing critique is constituted by a move to the right. Against Marx, Honneth maintains that individual freedom (negative freedom and reflexive freedom) is compatible with social freedom. Given this compatibility, Honneth does not need to worry too much about whether the market sphere can plausibly be reconstructed as a sphere of social freedom. In fact, in his "Rejoinder" (2015) Honneth admits that only a post-capitalist market can embody social freedom. The social theory he proposes in FR and TIOS follows from his earlier work. As such, it

inherits the particular strength and weaknesses; the normative reconstruction seems based on idealised accounts of the different institutional spheres. I will discuss this feature of Honneth's work in the last chapter. Honneth's social theory is persuasive when he introduces his analysis of pathologies and misdevelopments. The strength of his theory is the powerful account of the different mechanisms of oppression that we find in the different spheres. The diagnosis his theory affords seems complex, substantial, insightful and timely, and it allows us to formulate attempts at practical solutions.

## NOTES

1. Honneth offers a detailed discussion of Hegel's project already in *Pathologies of Individual Freedom* (PIF). Here Hegel is presented as a proto-Critical Theorist who derives a theory of justice from the values embodied by social institutions, where this theory of justice is inextricably linked to an analysis and "diagnosis" of (Hegel's) contemporary society (PIF, 2). The Hegelian project tackles the question of the role of morality within contemporary society. Honneth's reading of Hegel as involved in social critique is different from, but compatible with, a reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* as a project of reconciliation. According to the reconciliation thesis, Hegel tries to reconcile subjects with social institutions by showing that the latter are rational—that is, they realise freedom. The task of philosophy is therapeutic; by reconciling subjects with their social situation, philosophy helps to overcome alienation (see preface of *Philosophy of Right*). There are thus similarities between the therapeutic ambitions of Hegel and those of Critical Theorists; both try to cure social pathologies. However, Critical Theorists tend to reject reconciliation in favour of exposing oppressive structures. This reading of Hegel as engaged in a process of reconciliation is thus problematic since it seems to support a reading of Hegel as justifying the status quo of a given society. However, as indicated above, reconstructing a theory of justice from the values that underlie social institutions still allows for a critique of those institutions. While Honneth already proposes some updates to the Hegelian project in PIF (see, for example, PIF, 66–72, for a proposal to include friendship into the sphere of intimate relations and thus separate the construction of the sphere from questions of legal enforcement, and 77–80 for a proposal to introduce a notion of "public freedom" into the third sphere), I will focus here on *Freedom's Right* (FR), which presents a much more thorough reworking and "modernisation" of the Hegelian project.

2. In fact, David N. McNeill doubts that Honneth manages to replace the Hegelian metaphysics. In his eyes, Honneth's normative reconstruction lacks compelling grounding (McNeill, "Social Freedom and Self-Actualization").

3. For Hegel, the philosophy of right traces the realisation of the idea of right. (For a discussion of the problem of opting for a non-metaphysical reading, see McNeill.)

4. Honneth is fully aware that the nature of social institutions has changed. Hegel deals with stable institutions and roles and normative expectancies that are fixed. Honneth deals with social roles and associated normative expectations that are flexible. Institutional relations are fluid, and normative expectations change more so than in Hegel's time. Especially in the light of the horrors of the Third Reich, we can no longer ascribe to stable normative progress throughout history.

5. FR, 18.

6. FR, 3. To emphasise the similarity to Hegel, Honneth concludes that "in this weak sense, every society embodies objective Spirit to a certain extent, because its institutions, social practices and routines reflect shared normative beliefs about the aims of cooperative interaction" (FR, 4).

7. Notions of justice, for example, the idea that we should understand justice in terms of deserts, are based on social ideals and norms. These social ideals and norms determine social roles, different social spheres and institutions; hence, they determine our normative understand-

ing and normative expectations. Honneth understands justice as a “binding and permanent intention to render to everyone his [or her] due”. Rendering one’s due means treating a person in such a way as is appropriate to this person’s “individual personality”. But which aspects of a person’s personality are relevant and determine either equal or differential treatment (in the name of justice) is determined by the normative understanding we have of the person’s role in a specific sphere, which, in turn, is determined by the normative role this sphere plays for society as such.

8. FR, 20–21.

9. Honneth regards the Third Reich as a complete “other” to his normative reconstruction. It is an example of the worst abuses of power and the worst consequences of a pseudo-biological extreme nationalism. The barbarism of the Third Reich forces Honneth to be cautious about the idea of progressive history—history is not inevitably progressive (320–21).

10. See, for example, Honneth, “The Irreducibility of Progress”.

11. See Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”; Jütten, “Is the Market a Sphere of Social Freedom?”; Freyenhagen, “Honneth on Social Pathologies”; McNeill, “Social Freedom and Self-Actualization”. They all express their worries in different ways and related to different particular issues.

12. See Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”, 108; FR, 210, for an example of radical critique. Radical critique may proceed with reference to norms that are available in countercultures but which are not embodied in social institutions. However, unless those values are somehow derived immanently, they are prone to result from either constructivism or authoritarian.

13. Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”, 108, 110–12; FR, 9–10, 141.

14. Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”, 111.

15. Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”, 121.

16. Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”, 125–26.

17. Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”; Freyenhagen, “Honneth on Social Pathologies”; McNeill, “Social Freedom and Self-Actualization”.

18. FR, 210. Honneth allows that some struggles are not based on “freedom”, such as those concerned with environmental or climate change issues (Honneth, “Rejoinder” [2015], 209). It seems that some of the values that some environmental protection movements appeal to are ultimately derived from the value of freedom. Even the ecologist position that values the ecosystem also emphasises the fact that human animals are part of the ecosystem and are dependent on its survival.

19. Honneth, “Rejoinder” (2015), 210.

20. Honneth, “Rejoinder” (2015), 210.

21. Honneth, “Negative Freedom and Cultural Belonging”. See Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*.

22. Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

23. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*; Hobbes, *Leviathan*; Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, regarding the social contract.

24. FR, 24.

25. FR, 23.

26. See FR, 86–94; Hegel also regards indeterminacy as the key deficit of abstract right. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*.

27. FR, 33.

28. FR, 31–33.

29. See also FR, 35; Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”; and Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, for a recognition-theoretical account of authenticity.

30. FR, 37.

31. FR, 38.

32. FR, 39. In the case of “collective self-realisation” the focus is on group solidarity as a necessary condition. This is the view of justice that underlies some communitarian accounts.

33. FR, 40.

34. FR, 113–20.

35. FR, 45.

36. Both Honneth and Neuhouser regard this as the main difference between Rousseau and Hegel. Neuhouser holds that both philosophers offer slightly different solutions to a similar problem (Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Philosophy*); Honneth classifies Rousseau's conception of freedom as reflexive freedom rather than social freedom. It seems to me that both Honneth and Neuhouser exaggerate the difference between Rousseau and Hegel in this aspect. While it is true that they offer different solutions, it seems that Rousseau also regards dependency as intrinsic to freedom. While Rousseau emphasises authenticity (for example, in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and in *Emile*), it seems that recognition and esteem by others is an intrinsic part of authentic self-realisation (it is what the intrinsic human capacity for amour propre strives for, even in its authentic and properly developed form), and so relations of mutual recognition are not just an external condition but also an embodiment of freedom.

37. See, for example, FR, 151.

38. "Not only must individual intentions be developed without any external influence, but the external, social reality must be able to be conceived as being free of all heteronomy and compulsion" (FR, 44).

39. For example, FR, 42.

40. FR, 45.

41. FR, 44.

42. Jütten, "Is the Market a Sphere of Social Freedom?" Jütten bases parts of his critique of Honneth's account of the market on this reading. Even though the Marxist reading must be modified in light of the fact that Honneth sides with Hegel against Marx exactly when it comes to questions of incorporating individual freedom, it is correct that it follows from both Marx and Honneth that the capitalist structure of the market does not seem compatible with social freedom (and completion). However, this does not mean that we could not aim for market socialism; in other words, this is a problem for a capitalist structure of the market and might not be a problem for markets per se.

43. FR, 43.

44. We find references to this view variously in the early writings (alienated labour, Mill excerpts, Jewish question).

45. See Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in *Early Writings*.

46. See Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*", in *Early Writings*.

47. See also Wood, *Karl Marx*.

48. Marx emphasises the independence and hostility of product and externalised labour at various points, esp. 322–34 (Marx, *Early Writings*).

49. Marx, *Early Writings*, 326.

50. Marx, *Early Writings*, 330–31.

51. Marx, *Early Writings*, 334.

52. Marx, *Early Writings*, 263.

53. Marx, *Early Writings*, 267.

54. Marx, *Early Writings*, 265.

55. Marx, *Early Writings*, 331–34; see also Chitty, "Recognition and Property". We can find Marx's position on the incompatibility of social and negative freedom also in his discussion of human rights ("universal rights of man", *Early Writings*, 227) in "On the Jewish Question". Here Marx distinguishes between the rights of citizens (as members of the state) and "man". "Man" refers to members of civil society. "Rights of man" protects the rights of individual members of civil society. The key rights are liberty, property rights and equality. The individual in civil society is conceived of as "egoistic man, man separated from other man" (229), as self-interested, independent monad who chooses to interact with others mainly through contracts, regulated by (property) law. Liberty, equality, property and security are interpreted in this context in a particular way: liberty is negative liberty; equality is mainly equal access to liberty ("everyone [is] equally a self-sufficient monad", 230); security is secure access to property and liberty. Overall, then, human rights as the rights of "man" protect individuals' rights to be non-social, to be egoistic, self-sufficient atoms that have highly limited forms of

interaction with others. Because the rights to property and property rights themselves become the paradigm of negative freedom and eventually of freedom itself in this context, human rights under capitalism lead to alienation. We misidentify our essence and treat that which really is our essence (species being and true community) as a limitation of that which we take to be our essence (property ownership) and we have rights that minimise this limitation. Citizens and the state are a means of protecting those rights, so that Marx can claim that citizens are “servant[s] of egoistic man” (231). It is worthwhile to point out that Marx does think that negative freedom even under conditions of capitalism is an advancement compared to feudalism (233). Human beings are freer under capitalism, and so negative freedom is valuable but—much like Hegel—this conception of freedom alone is insufficient. We are not truly free when we are intellectually and practically alienated.

56. See, for example, Friedman and Friedman, “Chancen, die ich meine”; Sowell, *Basic Economics*.

57. See Friedman and Friedman, “Chancen, die ich meine”; Sowell, *Basic Economics*.

58. FR, 180.

59. FR, 190.

60. FR, 191.

61. FR, 192.

62. FR, 192.

63. FR, 192–93.

64. Honneth describes the sphere of consumption as a sphere of mutual recognition, and hence an embodiment of social freedom, in various places (for example, page 205, in connection with an exposition on Hegel, and again on page 208 as premise to his own argument).

65. The method of advertising changes over time, with advertising promising status in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (FR, 200–201) or happiness and success from twentieth century to present (FR, 211).

66. FR, 201.

67. FR, 204–5.

68. FR, 203–11.

69. FR, 203.

70. FR, 209.

71. FR, 210.

72. FR, 212.

73. FR, 214–16.

74. FR, 218.

75. FR, 222.

76. FR, 237–38.

77. FR, 223–28.

78. FR, 230–31.

79. FR, 233–38.

80. FR, 240–44.

81. FR, 243.

82. FR, 247.

83. FR, 248; see also discussions of the paradoxes of individualisation in chapter 5.

84. FR, 249.

85. FR, 251.

86. FR, 250.

87. FR, 237–46. Honneth’s conception of labour has undergone some changes and has been subject to debate (see, for example, Jütten, “Dignity, Esteem, and Social Contribution”). It seems that Honneth is aware that some of the socially valuable (and hence necessary) labour might not cohere to the craftsmanship ideal of labour (especially work in the service industry) but might be repetitive and require little “initiative”. Still, the structure and distribution of this type of labour, as well as the esteem given for it, might be such that this type of labour can also contribute to the self-realisation of the worker.

88. In his criticism of Honneth’s account of the market, Timo Jütten argues that social freedom is not possible in a capitalist market (see Jütten, “Is the Market a Sphere of Social

Freedom?”). In his response, Honneth seems to concede that social freedom can only be properly embodied in post-capitalist markets (Honneth, “Rejoinder” [2015]). This response suggests that for Honneth the capitalist market is legitimised by values it cannot embody, a classical Marxist analysis, based on a Hegelian view of the compatibility of individual and social freedom. As a consequence, Honneth demands a change from capitalist markets to market socialism.

89. FR, 254.
90. FR, 254.
91. FR, 254.
92. FR, 304.
93. FR, 256–57; see also Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.
94. FR, 258–59.
95. FR, 260.
96. FR, 260.
97. FR, 261.
98. FR, 268.
99. FR, 271; see also Honneth’s earlier essay about his appropriation of Dewey, “Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation”.
100. FR, 269.
101. FR, 269.
102. FR, 272–74.
103. FR, 261–62.
104. FR, 263–64.
105. See Abizadeh, “Does Collective Identity Presuppose an Other?”
106. FR, 264–67.
107. FR, 273–74.
108. FR, 290–94.
109. FR, 292–300.
110. FR, 298–99.
111. FR, 302.
112. FR, 305.
113. FR, 305.
114. FR, 305.
115. FR, 310.
116. Honneth briefly mentions the debate between Sigmund Freud and Hans Kelsen in the early 1920s. Freud thought that the nation becomes an “object of love” for individuals, who identify with each other through this shared love. The attitude towards the object of love is one of admiration, and it leads to a “loss of distance and ability to reflect” (FR, 315). Whereas Kelsen thought of national identification along the lines of a form of constitutional patriotism, where the nation is a “normatively bounded group”, and individuals identify reflectively with the norms (FR, 316).
117. As mentioned above, Marx, for example, thinks that private property is inevitably linked to exploitation, alienation and generally all the misdevelopments in capitalism.
118. FR, 318–19.
119. FR, 325.
120. FR, 323.
121. FR, 324.
122. Honneth is vague about the scope of the public (i.e. who is to be excluded and who is to be included) and of course there are questions about what constitutes equal participation or the ability to participate as equals. These problems are similar to problems Nancy Fraser faces in her theory of justice. Here the scope of who participates and the criteria of participatory equality have to be settled discursively—and are provisional and open to change as long as participatory parity has not been achieved. While this might, as Fraser holds, just be the reflexive feature of democracy (Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*), it might also be the shortfall.
123. FR, 306–7.

124. FR, 308.

125. Of course, if the political realist is also a post-structuralist of a specific persuasion, there might now be difficulties with justifying the extrinsic principles—but that is a different matter for now.

126. See Schaub, “Misdevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions”.

127. Honneth, *Die Idee des Sozialismus* (DIDS), 23–25.

128. DIDS, 27–28.

129. DIDS, 27.

130. DIDS, 31–32.

131. DIDS, 30–32. Evidence for Honneth’s view here can be found, for example, in Robert Owen’s own justification of the need for producer associations (DIDS, 29).

132. Proudhon, for example, claims, “From the social standpoint, freedom and solidarity are identical concepts” (in DIDS, 34, translation mine).

133. DIDS, 55.

134. DIDS, 55–56.

135. DIDS, 55.

136. DIDS, 94–95.

137. We can see the proximity between Honneth’s position in FR and his position in DIDS—where in both cases the expansion of freedom is the standard of progress. However, in DIDS Honneth does not explicitly rely on backward-looking historical progress.

138. DIDS, 99–100. The idea of the necessity of communication between individuals is not limited to human beings. According to Honneth, Dewey holds that this theory of interaction and communication works on the basic physical level, the organic level, the mental and the (human) social level. On the social level, communication and its role in releasing potentials is special, because new lines of communication allow new interpretations, and so even those potentials that have already been realised gain new (potential) meanings (DIDS, 97–98).

139. DIDS, 101.

140. DIDS, 102.

141. DIDS, 104–5.

142. DIDS, 108–9.

143. DIDS, 112–15. In this context Honneth mentions, for example, social housing, the attempts of unions to “humanise” labour.

144. DIDS, 127.

145. DIDS, 129–30.

146. DIDS, 133.

147. DIDS, 138–41.

148. See also Honneth, “Diseases of Society”.

149. DIDS, 143.

150. DIDS, 151.

151. DIDS, 160.

152. Honneth faces some ontological issues with his relatively recent move to an organicistic view of society (a view we also find in “The Diseases of Society”).

153. See, for example, Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

154. See also Jütten, “Dignity, Esteem, and Social Contribution”; Wagner, “The Two Sides of Recognition”. The issue of recognition hierarchies and domination will be discussed in chapter 8.



## *Chapter Seven*

# **Honneth and Political Philosophy**

### *Democracy and Rawls*

With the account of the nature, scope and application of recognition theory in place it makes sense to evaluate it now in the context of and against some mainstream contemporary political philosophy. Mainstream contemporary political philosophy encompasses a variety of different approaches and issues. Because Honneth himself focuses mostly on Rawlsian liberal theories, much of this chapter will do likewise. This seems also justified in light of the influence that Rawls's particular approach still has, although the field itself is highly diverse and there are various types of liberalism, which will not be touched upon.

This chapter is divided into roughly three parts: First, I will outline Honneth's own positioning vis-à-vis liberal and communitarian approaches, with emphasis on the formal ethical nature of recognition; his recognition-theoretical account of democracy; and his rejection of Rawlsian liberal theories of justice as incomplete. The second part will mount a Rawlsian defence, which suggests that Honneth might in some parts have overestimated the differences between his and a Rawlsian approach. The third part will suggest that Honneth's contribution to political philosophy lies, more generally, in making "social pathology" available as a tool of analysis to help identify and overcome problems, such as political apathy or disenchantment and anti-democratic sentiments, and to help formulate a more penetrating critique of capitalism that is weightier because it refers to the motivational structure of individuals in a specific way, as well as adhering to empirical data.

## 7.1. HONNETH'S POSITIONING IN CURRENT DEBATES

A promising way to disclose Honneth's unique contribution to political philosophy is to trace his ideas from his intervention in the communitarianism-liberalism debate of the 1980s, which reached Germany in the 1990s. In his essays concerned with liberalism and communitarianism, Honneth formulates his criticism of liberalism and proceduralism, of Rawls and Habermas alike, and he also introduces his conception of democracy and the link between the social and the political.

### 7.1.1. Honneth and a Shared Conception of the Good

The communitarianism-liberalism debate begins with the critical reception of John Rawls's seminal *A Theory of Justice* (ToJ). Rawls revives a Kantian social contract theory tradition and uses the tool of a hypothetical consent between rational, mutually disinterested agents under conditions of partial ignorance to justify liberal-egalitarian principles of justice. More specifically, Rawls holds that we can translate the Kantian intuitions of autonomy and impartiality (the moral point of view) into a thought experiment: the "Original Position". In the "original position", rational, mutually disinterested parties, who represent citizens, come together to decide on the first principles of justice, which are to guide the institutions and basic structure of society. These parties deliberate under a "veil of ignorance", which means that they have no knowledge of their particular circumstances—that is, they are ignorant of their personal preferences, interests and projects, their social and economic position, their religious beliefs and specific culture. They do not know which conception of the good they will want to pursue. However, they do have knowledge of the empirical theories pertaining generally to societies, so they will be aware that different people have different skills, different conceptions of the good, and the parties in the original position possess knowledge of theories about sociology, political affairs and economy. In this condition, the participants in the original position deliberate about different normative principles to govern the basic structure of their society. The principles they choose aim at a fair distribution of rights and basic goods such that everyone is as much as possible in a position to pursue their own comprehensive conception of the good life by being provided with the necessary rights and basic goods and opportunities. In addition to the two principles that participants will choose—the principle of equal liberty and the difference principle (see below)—Rawls also insists on the priority of right over good (or morality over ethics). Justice concerns the right of everyone to pursue their own conception of the good life. It should not prescribe a particular conception of the good life. Insofar as the state enacts principles of justice,

the state and associated institutions and instruments must be neutral between different reasonable conceptions.

The heuristic of the original position, which translates Kantian intuitions, also gives the impression of an impartial assessment (and rejection) of utilitarianism and all other theories and principles considered under the veil of ignorance. The choice of the participants is presented as an impartial, rational choice. Participants will agree on two principles of a distribution of “primary goods”: First, basic liberties are to be distributed equally among all members of society such that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others”.<sup>1</sup> And second, inequalities, which must not pertain to basic liberties, may be justifiable only if (and must be arranged such that) the inequalities mean that the worst off are better off than they would be without the inequality and if positions attached to advantage are open to all. There is a lexical priority of the first principles and the liberties distributed include freedom of thought, political liberties, freedom from psychological oppression, right to property and so on.<sup>2</sup>

More could be said, but this brief introduction is sufficient for our purposes. The “communitarian” response is not at all a homogenous response. Philosophers here are diverse and include Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor. We can identify roughly two dimensions of critique: an ontological and a normative critique. On the ontological level, Sandel, MacIntyre and Taylor emphasise the embeddedness of the self (or what Honneth calls, “situatedness”).<sup>3</sup> An individual is born into a community and dependent for identity formation and maintenance on relations with others. The view of the self as isolated and independent is wrong, and it overlooks that individuals can only become autonomous in relation with others as members of communities. Normatively this implies that if we value autonomy and, certainly, if we value personal integrity, we have to protect those types of communities that allow individuals to form meaningful conceptions of themselves. The principles of justice must be such that value communities are protected. For Taylor, the Rawlsian approach fails to do so, because the impartiality and apparent neutrality to particular comprehensive conceptions of the good mean that minority cultures will “lose out” to majority culture.<sup>4</sup> The survival of minority cultures might depend on special protections or exemptions (e.g. exemptions that pertain to the Amish).

Rawls responds to his critics by accepting the ontological claim but rejecting normative communitarian implications. While he modifies the justification of his theory and moves away from notions of unanimous agreement on two principles, in favour of an idea of overlapping consensus under conditions of reasonable value pluralism, he remains committed to the priority of the right over the good and neutrality between different reasonable conceptions of the good. Moreover, he questions the communitarian position be-

cause, without recourse to an objective standard that can serve to adjudicate, it must accept all cultures as equally valuable and worthy of protection, or else communitarianism must come up with culture-transcending moral criteria to evaluate particular cultures by.<sup>5</sup>

At this point Honneth enters the debate, suggesting that both Rawlsian liberalism and communitarianism are in fact unable to come up with context-transcending, trans-cultural normative standards that are binding for the political community that is to be governed by the given theory of justice. Honneth agrees with Rawls in that communitarians need such standards because they must be able to adjudicate in cases of conflicts between cultures and so to distinguish good or better cultures from wrong cultures. Contrary to Rawls, however, Honneth thinks that Rawls has a similar need, especially the later Rawls of *Political Liberalism*, discussed in more detail below, because Rawls needs to justify the normative status he ascribes to liberal conceptions and values of “Western democracies” above other conceptions.<sup>6</sup> Honneth argues that what is required is a “formal model of ethical life”<sup>7</sup>—that is, a discourse ethics.<sup>8</sup> Discourse ethics, bounded by moral constraints of the protection of autonomy, allows all affected parties to agree on a shared conception of the political or social good, which in turn allows both the evaluation of other value systems and the formation of autonomous selves.<sup>9</sup> Honneth also argues for the need of a community with a shared (formal) conception of ethical life and thus for shared goals elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> The need for a formal ethical conception of the good which binds a political community and allows relations of solidarity and social esteem among members, who are all seen as contributing to the social good, feeds into Honneth’s conception of democracy. Moreover, a formal conception of the good provides criteria to judge better or worse models of society. In contrast to communitarianism and liberalism, Honneth does not have to accept every community as good and worthy of protection, nor does he have to remain neutral vis-à-vis different conceptions of the good.<sup>11</sup>

### 7.1.2. Honneth’s Notion of Democracy

As we saw in the previous chapter, Honneth also proposes a distinct conception of democracy. I will follow up this account here. This section will focus on different aspects of his theory from the discussion in the previous chapter. Here I will focus on the account he offers in an earlier essay.<sup>12</sup> Honneth situates his approach between three alternative conceptions of democracy: liberal, republican and procedural. The liberal conception, which is based on the conception of individuals as already autonomous and independent, limits democracy to the periodic exercise of voting rights in the context of an openness of political offices. Citizens have the right to vote and the right to stand as candidates for political office in periodic elections. Radical demo-

cratic approaches, in contrast, hold that democracy requires an ongoing and permanent participation of citizens, which must be “embodied in the democratic public sphere”.<sup>13</sup> Honneth, following Habermas, distinguishes between “republican” and “procedural” approaches (where procedural here should not be confused with the liberal procedural approach of Rawls).<sup>14</sup> Both approaches aim at free consensus among citizens about matters of politics. Free consensus is formed in public discourse in which all citizens can engage as equals and raise and contest validity claims. Validity is established according to rational criteria.<sup>15</sup> Republican and procedural approaches differ in their perception of the demos and consequently their beliefs in the possibility of finding free, unanimous consensus. Republicans imagine a citizenry bound through relations of solidarity and shared thick conceptions of the common good. Such a homogenous community can organise itself in and through communicative discourse and so manage political decision-making without government and state institutions. The role of governmental institutions is relegated to improving communicative structures and executing decisions of the citizenry. Laws in this view express the collective self-understanding of the citizens.<sup>16</sup> Rousseau himself arguably has a homogenous view of the citizenry. Moreover, in order to maintain homogeneity and to prevent a feeling of powerlessness among citizens, Rousseau also demands that political communities remain relatively small, certainly smaller than most current nation-states, thus enabling self-organisation. Size and homogeneity thus contribute to the shared thick comprehensive conception of the social good and hence enable consensus.<sup>17</sup> Proceduralists also give a central role to public discourse and reason, but the complexity of issues and communicative structures as well as the heterogeneity of the population mean that state institutions also play an important role in the decision-making process. Public opinion, formed through open and free public discourse, informs state policies and decisions. But governments have the task to rationally and independently test the input from the public and reach decisions bound by laws, public opinion and empirical possibility, assessed in formal debate.

In Honneth’s view, while both approaches are an improvement over the liberal view, as democratic theories, they are wanting because they fail to sufficiently connect the political sphere to the social sphere. While both approaches reject the liberal view of the isolated, independent, autonomous individual and instead hold that individual autonomy is formed and maintained in and through political participation, they restrict cooperation to the level of linguistic discourse.<sup>18</sup> This restriction means that they are unable to explain why or how individuals should or can be motivated—with considerable sacrifice to their own projects—to actively and permanently participate in ongoing democratic will-formation. Because Honneth is aware of the demandingness of political participation, he knows he needs to address motivation. The particular way in which Honneth locates the political in the social

sphere and social cooperation beyond discourse means that Honneth proposes an approach to democracy that illustrates the importance of democratic engagement for individuals beyond the political sphere. This social account, which appeals to the embodied, vulnerable and affective dimension of individuals, serves as a tool to diagnose the pathological nature of “apathy” and anti-democratic tendencies (including populism), as I will show below. Drawing on Dewey, Honneth grounds the political in the social, but—unlike the early Dewey—he also regards the political as distinct from the social.

The starting point for Dewey is a pre-political social community<sup>19</sup> in which individuals cooperate and thus contribute to each other’s survival as well as the reproduction of the community. The complexity of needs and problems that require cooperative solutions means that even at the pre-political level there is a division of labour. Every individual contributes in their specific way to the good of the whole. Two things follow: There is a shared conception of the good, and because every individual contributes to the social good, “each individual . . . possesses the entire sovereignty through which all individuals, as people, jointly become the sovereign bearer of power”.<sup>20</sup> The democratic idea is rooted in and co-exists with social cooperation. We can recall from previous chapters, especially from the discussion of *Freedom’s Right*, that social cooperation is necessary for self-realisation. Individuals self-realise in cooperation with others because cooperation affords the satisfaction of material needs and of cognitive needs. Individuals, however, must be aware of the nature of the common good and social cooperation as genuinely contributing to the individual good. Subjects must be aware of the fact that their self-realisation is conditioned on their contribution to the self-realisation of their partners in cooperation.<sup>21</sup> Dewey supports his theory with reference to the psychological theory of the intersubjective nature of subject formation and practical self-relations as well as an epistemological argument. Again, we already saw in the last chapter that Dewey, in line with some contemporary philosophical literature on collective decision-making (e.g. List and Pettit, *Group Agency*), holds that our collective rational problem-solving capacities increase the more individuals contribute to the public discourse. The more individuals partake, the better our information about problems and the effects of proposed solutions.<sup>22</sup>

The overall (mature) approach of Dewey holds that we are dependent on and flourish in communities of social cooperation, but social cooperation requires complex problem-solving mechanisms, because social actions sometimes have “indirect consequences”<sup>23</sup> that affect more than just those immediately engaged in interaction. In order to allow self-realisation for everyone, society as such must be in control of those actions and consequences that affect those not directly involved. This is where the public enters as the forum of joint problem solving. The public will is then enforced by state institutions, which also guarantee every individual (citizen) the conditions

under which they can freely participate in public discourse.<sup>24</sup> The political sphere is a sphere of collective problem solving (and enactment of joint decisions) to aid the necessary and fundamental social cooperation that allows individuals to experience themselves as contributors to a social good that entails their own good.

While the mature Dewey can conceptualise the political as distinct from the social, it seems that he still underestimates the complexity of political organisation and decision-making. Still, Honneth accepts the basic account of democracy as rooted in social cooperation and division of labour. Various consequences follow. For one, a just division of labour, in which individuals are accorded the social esteem they deserve on the basis of their contribution, is now necessary as a matter of democracy. Individuals cannot self-realise through social cooperation if labour is organised in such a way that their contribution is not recognised (and hence they fail to secure the cognitive conditions of practical self-relations and hence self-realisation).<sup>25</sup> Consequently, we now have a criterion by which we can evaluatively distinguish between better and worse democracies—this criterion is trans-cultural. Unlike republicanism, we need not now accept every expression of the public will to be equally as good as any other. Unsurprisingly, the link between social labour and democracy in Honneth culminates in a recognition-theoretical account of democracy. This account is superior to rival accounts when it comes to grounding a motivation for individuals to participate: Insofar as political problem solving is an inevitable part of the social cooperative effort and social cooperation is necessary for self-formation and realisation, an awareness of the interconnectedness should lead individuals to regard ongoing political participation as essential too. Politics is not just a matter of participating in public discourse but also a matter of governing essential social cooperation.

There are immediate concerns with the account. For one, it seems overly optimistic, as it appears to suggest that everybody can contribute to a shared social good and that everybody's unique contribution harmoniously matches everyone else's, what Thompson calls a "symphonic" view of a political community.<sup>26</sup> Neither seems plausible. And if it is the case that individuals' contributions do not neatly tie up or that some individuals cannot contribute to the shared good, the account seems to be in trouble. Those who cannot visibly contribute to the shared common project cannot gain esteem through contribution and seem less likely to be motivated to participate in the democratic process.<sup>27</sup> To some extent, much hinges, as Thompson suggests, on the precise notion of the shared purpose or common good of a society and how we construe what counts as "contribution". We know that Honneth here favours a thin conception, his formal conception of ethical life. The social good is the provision and guarantee of the possibility of cognitive relations.<sup>28</sup>

Further, it does not strike me as obvious that the account requires the kind of social harmony Thompson suggests. As mentioned above, Honneth relies on ongoing conflict about the value of contributions because this is the engine of progress. In many ways, the democratic process is one arena in which this conflict is carried out. Honneth's approach is valuable and useful because it spells out the criteria of critical analysis of democratic models. It also opens up a new dimension of social (political) pathologies and provides the diagnostic criteria. Such diagnoses in turn aid the formulation of practical remedies. These criteria are plausible because they help identify mechanisms that threaten emancipation. It seems to me that some objections Thompson raises against Honneth's account might be better regarded as criticism of the structure and division of labour from the perspective of cognitive democracy. It is the mark of a functioning, emancipatory democratic organisation that all individuals can engage in the kind of labour that is recognised as a contribution to the social good.<sup>29</sup> Especially current threats and pathologies—for example, a growing apathy or disenchantment, together with a rise of populist success and “angry voters”, the growing number of citizens who doubt the legitimacy of their democratic institutions in the United States of America and in a growing number of European countries—are explicable with reference to Honneth's recognition-theoretical account of democracy.

From apathy to the success of populism, it seems that the roots of the problem are a lack of opportunities to contribute to the social good and/or a lack of awareness on the part of all individuals that they are in cooperative social relations with all other members of a society or transnational community and, hence, a denial of recognition of some individuals. We can explain anti-democratic tendencies in European liberal democracies with reference to the notion of reflexive democracy (lack of awareness, lack of recognition of contribution) and equally, we can explain the wrong of such tendencies as well as discern some practical advice for how to reverse these feelings. Remedies might involve creating awareness through critical activity and restructuring our division of labour and possibly changing our practices of recognition. It is important to note here that it follows from Honneth's analysis that substantive restructuring of the economic sphere (for example, restructuring the organisation of labour) and/or of the valuation of labour might well be necessary in order to cure democratic pathologies. The critical force of this account as a critique of current (“neo-liberal”) practices should not be underestimated.

### 7.1.3. Critique of Proceduralism

In “The Fabric of Justice”, Honneth addresses the (renewed) disconnect between theory and praxis in contemporary mainstream political philosophy. He identifies the problem as follows:

There appears to be a general consensus about the fact that liberal-democratic societies are based on normative foundations, which require legal guarantees for the individual autonomy of all citizens. Furthermore, most would agree that these principles of legal and political equality require economic redistribution, allowing the disadvantaged to make effective use of their legally guaranteed rights. However, these general principles of social justice *are without any informational value for the praxis of political representatives and social movements*. When it comes to complex social problems, such as welfare state reform, *these widely accepted principles quickly lose their explanatory and advisory effect.*<sup>30</sup>

Further, “these normative principles seem to be formulated in a manner that prevents us from deriving guidelines for political action. It appears that we are constantly forced to draw on other norms that lack philosophical grounding, just to have a prospect of arriving at a ‘just’ solution”.<sup>31</sup>

In order to show how recognition theory overcomes these problems, Honneth identifies three assumptions that he claims find “wide agreement” among liberal theorists<sup>32</sup>: the distribution paradigm, proceduralism and the idea of the state as responsible for realising justice.

The distribution paradigm as paradigm of justice arises out of a few interrelated notions. For one, liberals “widely agree” that justice ought to guarantee maximal freedom to all members of a society.<sup>33</sup> Combined with a view of the individual subjects of justice as autonomous and independent agents, it seems obvious that what the state must guarantee are the necessary resources for individuals to exercise their freedom. Once individuals have the necessary (material) resources, as well as some legal protections of their rights (including property rights), individuals are free to pursue their own conceptions of the good. According to the distribution paradigm, justice is a matter of just distribution of resources within a society.<sup>34</sup>

Proceduralism is justified with reference to the autonomy of individuals and in light of the nature of justice as just distribution of goods. Free, autonomous agents have to consent to the principles and rules they abide by, and so procedures that enable free consent (or procedures that show that agents would rationally consent) are to be developed.<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, because the state has the legitimate means to distribute and redistribute resources, the state, and not individuals, is responsible for the just distribution, which is the realisation of justice.<sup>36</sup>

Honneth criticises the basic starting point of liberal theories: the autonomous individual. Honneth emphasises that individuals must have developed practical self-relation (self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem) and be autonomous already in order for them to have projects and conceptions of the good they find worthy and thus in order to be able to value resources as enabling autonomous self-realisation. Individuals who lack practical self-relation and are not already autonomous will not be enabled to live autono-

mous lives merely by receiving material resources. If a just society is to guarantee maximal freedom, it must be concerned with the conditions of the formation of autonomy, which are mutual relations of recognition. The proper “material” of justice is thus not the distribution of goods only—though that will remain an important element, determined by recognitive needs—but the facilitation, institutionalisation and protection of necessary recognitive relations in different spheres of social life.

When relations of mutual recognition are the subject of justice, the distribution paradigm as paradigm of justice, proceduralism and the notion of the state alone as realising justice have to be abandoned. Relations of mutual recognition are not the kind of “stuff” that we can distribute at will and in the same way as material resources. The distribution paradigm only makes sense when applied to goods, not when applied to relationships. Similarly, procedures to decide on just distribution only make sense in cases where autonomous agents decide, in accordance with their autonomous will, on the distribution of the material in question. Instead, we must justify our institutionalised practices and the particular realisation of justice in different ways—that is, through normative reconstruction.<sup>37</sup> Historical normative reconstruction is appropriate because the context of justice is such that we always already find ourselves in a society with historically determined, contingent, practices of recognition. The starting point must be those practices. Only if those practices are completely distorted, and lack any normative value, should we adopt an impartial standpoint and, with reference to empirical theories, think about the creation of institutions and institutional frameworks and practices that can guarantee necessary recognition. This, however, is neither desirable nor likely in most cases.<sup>38</sup> Usually, we can find some undistorted principles of justice already present in our relations, which only need to be explicated. Because they are principles that already guide people, they are closely tied to our social world and less distanced from social practice.<sup>39</sup> In now familiar fashion, and as an example, Honneth traces the developments of recognition principles implicit in practices throughout history—that is, historical changes to our understanding of love and care (and our resulting self-understanding) that go hand in hand and partially guide changes in the institutional sphere of the family, changes in our understanding of respect that accompany and are accompanied by changes to the institution of law (changes in inclusivity and individualisation) and changes of our understanding of social status in terms of esteem earned through achievement rather than estate-based orders of esteem.<sup>40</sup>

In light of the fact that relations of recognition are necessary not only in the legal sphere, which is governed by the state, but also in the family and social spheres, the realisation of justice must be achieved by the state and non-state institutions alike. The liberal division of labour must thus also be

abandoned. Rather, it is a matter of all kinds of social institutions and practices (in all spheres) to facilitate and protect relations of mutual recognition.

At this point, it is worth pointing out that John Rawls himself, who is the main target of Honneth's criticism, is aware of the social basis of self-respect or self-esteem (in his discussion, Rawls uses both interchangeably).<sup>41</sup> For Rawls, self-esteem consists in a sense of a person's own value and confidence in their abilities. Without self-esteem, subjects could not pursue their conception of the good life. In other words, in Rawls, self-esteem is seen as a precondition of autonomy also. Further, Rawls is aware that self-esteem is partly based on the esteem individuals receive from their "associates", for both shared conceptions of the good and excellences. Again, in Rawls, self-esteem, as a precondition of autonomy, is based on recognition by others. Moreover, in a well-ordered society, which is a society "designed to advance the good of its members",<sup>42</sup> everyone ought to be able to find other subjects who share the same conception of the good and who can thus provide esteem. Rawls assumes that every member in a well-ordered society, governed by the principles of justice chosen in the original position, will be able to receive esteem because the idea of justice, the priority of right (as a matter of justice) over the good, preserves value pluralism. In other words, because justice does not prescribe a substantive conception of the good in those well-ordered societies, various conceptions of the good will be pursued. However, while we can find these rudiments of a recognition in Rawls, Rawls does not offer a well-worked-out recognition-theoretical account of justice. In fact, in his account as well, key aspects of recognition are moved to the sphere of the "good" away from the sphere of justice. Consequently, Rawls does not work out criteria about when what type of recognition is due—as a matter of justice. Honneth provides not only a more differentiated and in-depth account of recognition and its relation to autonomy (via practical self-relation) but also a framework which governs recognition and which serves as a reference point for recognition claims, binding on all members in a society, as a matter of justice.

Having said all that, it is important to emphasise that questions of the distribution of primary goods and of inequalities, as well as the notion of rights (including universal rights), remain a part of Honneth's theory of justice, but they are complemented by provisions that enable the formation and maintenance of autonomy.

## 7.2. HONNETH VERSUS RAWLS

Rawls is the main target of Honneth's critique of constructivist political philosophy and Miriam Bankovsky provides an in-depth discussion of Honneth's objections to Rawls. However, I will not reiterate the arguments

here.<sup>43</sup> The aim of this section is to work out what the unique contribution of Honneth's Critical Theory is, and to this end, this section will focus on those aspects of Rawls's approach which Honneth takes himself to have improved on. Beyond being the main target of Honneth's critique, Rawls also presents a robust kind of constructivism. His method, his focus on coherence with empirical data, is well equipped—for constructivist theories—to meet Honnethian objections to the approach generally. It is a particularly strong theory in light of those features Critical Theory would identify as weaknesses of constructivism. Further, the Rawlsian approach is still influencing approaches in political philosophy. This is not to downplay the extreme diversity in political philosophy today. Analytic political philosophy deals with a variety of issues, ranging from multiculturalism to migration, global justice and issues related to climate change, as well as more “traditional” concerns about just distribution and justice in the family. Additionally, political realism—itself a term that covers different and conflicting approaches—has moved from the sidelines into the centre. Yet constructivist approaches to justice still form an important part of what political philosophers engage with.

We have seen that Honneth proposes a recognition-theoretical approach to justice and to democracy that he holds to be superior to liberal political theories for three reasons: First, Honneth's formal conception of ethical life allows him to respond to (originally communitarian) demands that justice must be able to incorporate the intersubjective dimension of self-formation, autonomy and authenticity and to respond to the challenges of value pluralism without falling prey to cultural relativism. The formal nature of his approach yields trans-cultural criteria of justice which can serve as a standard of evaluation of different models of society. Moreover, it is a theory that can determine the principles of justice without recourse to problematic proceduralism. Second, Honneth locates the normative dimension in social reality. He claims that there is thus less distance between theory and practice than there is for constructivist theories. Third, because he locates the political within the social he can provide a compelling account of the need for individuals to participate politically.

Overall, it seems that the advantages of recognition theory derive from its specific method of immanently constructing norms and the incorporation of empirical data. It makes sense to focus on the Rawlsian method of justification (of the principles of justice), especially his notion of “reflective equilibrium”. An in-depth understanding of the method affects how we perceive the relation between theory and practice as well as how we understand the normative dimension of Rawls's theory.

## 7.2.1. Method

Honneth's claim that the recognition approach is closer to social practice than liberal theories rests to some extent on the difference between constructivist and reconstructivist approaches. For Honneth, because constructivist approaches formulate principles of justice independently of social reality, they remain distant to social reality. However, especially a Rawlsian can object here: on the one hand, Rawls claims a certain closeness to the empirical realm; on the other hand, it is not clear that Honneth's reconstructivism does not ultimately entail very similar abstractions and reference to abstract (liberal) values as Rawls's reflective equilibrium does. It makes sense to look at Rawls's method in more detail.

### 7.2.1.1. *Reflective Equilibrium*

The justification of the principles of justice as well as the justification of the particular nature of the thought experiment in Rawls is quite complex. The principles of justice are justified in one way because they are chosen by the parties in the original position under the veil of ignorance and conditions of mutually disinterested rationality, where the choice itself is based on deductive reasoning.<sup>44</sup> The original position itself is also in one way justified as a translation of basic Kantian assumptions into a thought experiment that is employed much like the notion of the state of nature in other (hypothetical) contract theories (though obviously the detail between Rawls's original position and, for example, Rousseau's state of nature differs widely). But, additionally, both the principles of justice and the setup of the original position are justified with reference to what Rawls calls a "reflective equilibrium".<sup>45</sup>

The reflective equilibrium is a coherentist method of justification. The aim of the method is to achieve coherence between an individual's beliefs, judgements and principles, preferably such that beliefs, judgements and principles are not only mutually consistent but also (at least in part) supportive of others. Coherence or equilibrium is achieved by going back and forth between the different beliefs (judgements and principles) and modifying or correcting some. Rawls is specifically interested in achieving reflective equilibrium between our considered judgements "with their supporting reasons"<sup>46</sup> about justice and principles of justice. Considered judgements are those which best reflect "our moral sentiment"<sup>47</sup> and are made under conditions conducive to making good judgements—that is, individuals must "have the ability, the opportunity and the desire to reach a correct decision".<sup>48</sup> Individuals must have knowledge of relevant facts, and it would be beneficial if they did not stand to benefit or lose from the judgement.<sup>49</sup> Applied to Rawls, the choices made in the original position must cohere with considered judgements, such as judgements like "racism is wrong" or "religious intolerance is wrong".<sup>50</sup> Equally, the setup of the original position must match our

considered, pre-theoretical judgements about justice (e.g. judgements referring to fairness). Beliefs, considered judgements and principles are only provisional fix points and open to revision in the light of other beliefs, judgements and principles. T. M. Scanlon describes the method such that we first analyse our considered judgements and formulate principles that can account for those judgements. We will then find that these principles will not account for all judgement, and so we have to decide whether some judgements shall be modified in light of principles or principles in light of judgements.<sup>51</sup> To some extent, these decisions are determined by the confidence we have in the judgements and principles in question. Overall, the reflective equilibrium is not as unstable as it seems. After all, coherence has to be achieved not just between two or three beliefs but between all beliefs; that requirement limits the revisability of particular beliefs.

Rawls distinguishes between what is now called a “narrow reflective equilibrium” and a “wide reflective equilibrium”.<sup>52</sup> When seeking a “narrow equilibrium”, individuals test their considered judgements against theories or principles that account for their beliefs. The “narrow equilibrium” has mostly descriptive pull; while it allows individuals to iron out irregularities between beliefs they ascribe to, it mostly describes the principles of their normative beliefs. It helps to uncover the “moral grammar”.<sup>53</sup> “Wide reflective equilibrium” confronts individuals with a wide array of principles, judgements and theories, including those that individuals’ pre-reflection might not have ascribed to. Wide reflective equilibrium, the consideration of a variety of conflicting theories and judgements, might move individuals to radically change their beliefs. Wide reflective equilibrium is what Rawls is concerned with in the original position where the parties have to consider various approaches to justice. Among the theories and judgements that have to be brought into equilibrium are also non-moral arguments and theories. Specifically, Rawls thinks that under the veil of ignorance, where parties are ignorant of their own particular position, they have all relevant empirical knowledge about sociology, politics, economics and psychology.<sup>54</sup> In this way, Bankovsky argues, Rawls’s theory does incorporate empirical reality.<sup>55</sup> She points out that among the knowledge that feeds into the choice of principles of justice is also knowledge of the cognitive needs of individuals.<sup>56</sup>

#### 7.2.1.2. *Modifications in Political Liberalism*

In light of the critical reception of ToJ, Rawls modifies aspects of his theory, including some that pertain to the method of justification. While ToJ is committed to the idea that all parties agree to the same principles for the same reasons and that those principles cohere to our considered judgements of justice, in *Political Liberalism*, agreement is an “overlapping consensus” among political persons who agree for different reasons. There are a variety

of important additions. In *Political Liberalism*, overlapping consensus is among individuals who all have their own comprehensive theory of the good and who accept the “burdens of judgement” and “reasonable pluralism”. The burdens of judgement are the difficulties we encounter as reasonable individuals when trying to make correct judgements; these include (but are not exhausted by) conflicting and complex evidence, vague concepts and principles and different life experiences.<sup>57</sup> To some extent, the burdens of judgement explain reasonable disagreement. Insofar as disagreement and divergent conceptions of the good are reasonable, they should not be repressed;<sup>58</sup> this is what is meant by the acceptance of reasonable pluralism. Overlapping consensus can be reached if the different comprehensive conceptions of the good also contain political conceptions (of basic principles of justice), which are shared by all, irrespective of the comprehensive conceptions of the good. Of course, the conceptions of the basic principles of justice need to be consistent with the comprehensive conceptions of the good, but since many different comprehensive conceptions can be in a reflective equilibrium with basic principles of justice, overlapping consensus might be possible. The relevant aspect for our discussion here of the modification is that Rawls justifies his principles of justice now in the context of political persons and so engages with the reality of the experience of conflict and cooperation.

The few remarks above suffice to suggest a similarity between Rawls’s constructivism and Honneth’s reconstructive method. Rawls does not formulate principles of justice independent of lived social reality but appeals to the normative convictions that individuals actually have (uncovered in narrow reflective equilibrium and informing wide reflective equilibrium). Moreover, Rawls takes into account and insists on the importance of empirical theories, such as sociology, psychology, economics and politics. Overall, Rawls’s theory of justice could be seen as an explication of the principles of justice that follow from our liberal moral convictions—a reconstruction of our moral sentiments. Of course, the theory goes beyond that in prescribing frameworks for fair deliberation.

In response, it seems to me that there is a difference between an approach that nominally (rather than substantially) takes into account empirical theories—whatever they are—and an approach that incorporates and to some extent even arises out of a specific set of empirical theories. The latter approach is more vulnerable because its standing depends on the status of the particular empirical theories. The Rawlsian approach does not stand or fall with the standing of any particular empirical theory. However, Honneth does not merely refer to “empirical theories” in the abstract; he employs them to appeal to and account for the deep structures of human psychology, need and motivation. The Honnethian theory is closer to practice because it does not limit itself to the level of abstraction but operates on concrete, affective experiences of injustice. Honneth can thus “speak to” a wider audience and

can include those who do not discuss moral principles derived from considered moral judgements. The charge against the Rawlsian method is not an utter disregard of empirical data; it is that it operates at such an abstract level that it is indifferent to a high degree (though not completely) to the specifics of empirical theories. It fails to “connect” to the phenomenology of social and political life. As we will see in the last section, this means it is unable to correctly identify the nature of anti-democratic and oppressive tendencies, and it cannot suggest comprehensive solutions. Insofar as Rawls (especially the Rawls of *Political Liberalism*) aims to provide a framework for public deliberation about justice, he falls victim to the same objection Honneth raises against Habermas: the level of abstraction, the focus on abstract principles and arguments, excludes individuals who have not received middle-class education.

### 7.2.2. Normativity

The charge against Rawlsian liberalism does not just concern the level of abstractness. The problem here is more the nature of the distribution paradigm and its hidden assumption of autonomy. As we have seen, distributive issues arise at a level at which human beings have already attained some form of identity and conception of the good life. The proper object of justice, however, importantly includes the conditions under which individuals can become autonomous selves—that is, the necessary requirements for the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth, which are relations of mutual recognition. Because of the nature of the cognitive needs, moreover, recognition theory operates not only in the legal sphere but in all social spheres. While it engages with the conditions of autonomous self-formation, it is also able to distinguish between better or worse societies or more or less just structures, so it is a theory that provides a conception of ethical life, but the conception is a formal conception.

Bankovsky attempts a defence of Rawls here by emphasising Rawls's account of the importance of family life for the formation of self-confidence and his inclusion of self-respect among the basic goods that are to be distributed equally.<sup>59</sup> But, as suggested above, while the defence shows that Rawls is aware of the intersubjective needs of individuals, it still remains the case that Rawls's insight here does not manifest in the theory of justice. The conditions of mutual recognition and intersubjective needs are not what the principles apply to. Moreover, it seems correct when Honneth insists that self-respect, which is formed only through the right kind of cognitive relations, is not a basic good that can be distributed in the way in which goods like money and rights can be distributed. If Rawls were to take the intersubjective needs seriously, he would, at the very least, subject all spheres of social life to principles of justice, which is what some feminists would sug-

gest should be done to the family. Moreover, he would probably have to rethink the distribution paradigm. As it stands, it seems that the empirical data he is aware of do not filter through the theory of justice. If one wanted to be provocative, one might say that Rawls's theory of justice is a suggestion about the distribution of rights in the legal sphere of Honneth's recognition-theoretical approach to justice.

Having said that, one should not underestimate the critical potency of Rawls's theory on the distributive level. The critique of capitalism that can be yielded from a Rawlsian perspective seems very close to the critique we get from Honneth at the end of TIOS—inequalities are justified only insofar as the worst off are better off with them than without. It is open to us how we understand “better off”. The demands of Rawlsian justice in the economic sphere are considerable. Moreover, there might be strategic advantages to appealing to more mainstream political theory when justifying demands for change.

### 7.2.3. Scope

In defence of a Rawlsian or liberal approach, we might consider the scope of the rival approaches. Here it might appear as if the scope of Honneth's recognition theory is far more limited than that of most liberal theories. Rawls himself offers a theory of domestic and global justice. Even though the theory of global justice he proposes in *The Law of Peoples* is highly contested, some of the critics of Rawls's theory of international justice hold that his domestic theory itself can and should be applied globally. In other words, we should engage in a thought experiment of a global original position to distil the principles of justice that should inform international relations, basic structures and institutions. Certainly, ideas of negative duties that are justified in terms of liberal principles can yield demanding and complex theories of global justice. Moreover, Rawls deals with issues of intergenerational justice that cover our duties to future generations.<sup>60</sup>

Honneth dedicates far less space to the issue of global justice. In “Recognition between States”, he outlines a recognition theoretical analysis of international relations.<sup>61</sup> He argues that the actions of political agents in the international arena cannot be explained exclusively in terms of instrumental reasoning, power struggles and material gain. Rather, a considerable motivational factor—also of domestic pressure on international politics—consists in a demand for recognition of a state. Here Honneth does not distinguish between different spheres of recognition, as he thinks that the cognitive interests of the different actors (including citizens of the different states) are diverse. However, he argues that appreciating the cognitive dimension of international conflict opens up new possibilities to negotiate conflict. “Soft power of respect and esteem” can prevent escalation and human rights viola-

tions as well as the growth of terrorist organisations.<sup>62</sup> Honneth suggests that the possibility of aggressive or even violent international policies rests on narratives that convince populations that their state is disrespected by other states.<sup>63</sup> Equally, he thinks that the growth of terrorist organisations can partly be explained in terms of narratives of disrespect. The exercise of soft power would consist in correcting the narrative where it is wrong or correcting cognitive relations where they fail to honour legitimate cognitive claims or needs. Honneth also considers transnational relations in TIOS and FR. Honneth is aware of the transnational requirements for domestic relations of recognition and solidarity. Much like Habermas, he is aware of the limitations of the sovereignty of nation-states when it comes to questions ranging from economic structures to security and environment.

At this stage, I want to distinguish between the explicit answers Honneth gives and the potential of a global or transnational recognition-theoretical approach. In terms of the detailed suggestion Honneth makes, one might rightly be critical. More empirical research is needed to find out, for example, whether, how far and how exactly cognitive needs motivate terrorism or joining terrorist organisations. However, when we consider whether his approach could be formulated into a theory of international justice, we might be quite optimistic. Honneth's formal conception of ethical life is based on cognitive needs human beings possess qua being human beings. While the question of what constitutes proper love, respect and esteem is historically determined and differs from society to society, Honneth would maintain that recognition is a universal need. His theory is thus universal. Unlike liberal or cosmopolitan theories, it might also be thick enough to support relations of solidarity transnationally.

Habermas objects to the possibility of political cosmopolitanism on the basis that the universal values we all share are too abstract to ground necessary relations of solidarity.<sup>64</sup> Honneth, however, proposes a shared conception of the good which seems thin enough to be universally acceptable and might also suffice to ground relations of solidarity. Moreover, in FR, Honneth proposes a recognition-theoretical account of transnational solidarity which could serve the creation of a transnational public sphere.<sup>65</sup> Honneth's recognition-theoretical approach might be able to yield a global theory of justice, especially when combined with decolonial theories to overcome Eurocentrism (see chapter 8). Additionally, Honneth offers context-transcending thin criteria of justice. These criteria are abstract enough to invite a variety of concrete manifestations and interpretations but concrete enough to allow for substantive criticism of those societies that do not meet cognitive criteria. As such, it seems Honneth's theory is at least as well equipped as liberal theories to deal with issues of global justice, though justifications and narratives will differ.

In terms of the treatment of non-human animals and the environment, recognition theory might have considerable potential. While Honneth himself refuses to regard animals or the environment as subjects of justice independent of the meaning they have for individuals (reification), recognition theory has the potential to endow non-human animals at least with intendent normative status, inasmuch as they are embodied, vulnerable organisms.<sup>66</sup> When it comes to environmental politics, recognition theory is also quite potent. For one, there might be a connection between our attitude towards the environment and disrespect to human beings. Marxists and feminists suspect such links, which would allow a potent recognition-theoretical environmental theory (see chapter 5). Further, we can justify substantial environmental policies already on the basis of the meaning and value the environment has for other subjects. Even with reference to the idea of reification of objects Honneth actually espouses, where we only indirectly misrecognise the non-human environment, we can diagnose reckless environmental behaviour as pathological. While Honneth cannot offer a recognition-theoretical theory of intergenerational justice between present and (far away) future generations, the orientation of his theory as Critical Theory, towards future progress, understood as securing conditions for self-realisation, suggests that we also aim at improving the situation for future generations.

All of these points require more elaboration. At this stage, all I can do is suggest ways in which it might be possible to widen the scope of Honneth's recognition-theoretical approach.

### 7.3. THE RECOGNITION-THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Overall, it seems that Honneth's approach manages to go beyond Rawlsian liberal approaches in terms of the subject matter of justice, since he does account for the conditions of self-formation and autonomy. His locating the political in the social allows us a new perspective on current problems. Throughout Europe and in the United States, more and more people seem disgruntled with the democratic structure. In this situation, it is easy for populists to stir anti-democratic sentiments. With reference to Dewey, we have another set of analytic dimensions to understand (and counteract) the development. Instead of looking only at the traditional problem of the distribution of votes, the problem of entrenched minorities or even "paradoxes", we can now also look at issues at the level of social cooperation, just divisions of labour, cognitive relations of esteem and solidarity and an awareness of cognitive needs and contributions.<sup>67</sup> These dimensions, moreover, seem to correspond to the self-reports of, for example, some supporters of Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), some

Trump voters, some Brexit voters and so on. We can thus analyse not only pathologies of capitalism but also political pathologies (which sometimes might be related). Once we identify correctly the multidimensional causes of dissatisfaction, we are in a good place to translate them into recognition needs, evaluate them and respond appropriately. We can also see links between the social and the political in Deweyan terms. Insofar as individuals feel excluded from either social cooperation or cooperation that leads to esteem or solidarity, they are less prepared to partake in or support redistributive measures that rely on solidarity. The recognition-theoretical approach to the political then opens up a new dimension of pathologies, and it seems that this is an urgently needed, timely, contribution to seemingly regressive changes (return to narrow nationalism, authoritarianism, increase in xenophobia) in the political sphere.

## NOTES

1. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (ToJ), 53.
2. ToJ, 53.
3. See Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”.
4. Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”.
5. Honneth, “Limits of Liberalism”.
6. Honneth, “Limits of Liberalism”, 244.
7. Honneth, “Limits of Liberalism”, 246.
8. Honneth, “Limits of Liberalism”, 246.
9. Honneth, “Limits of Liberalism”, 246. We can easily add to this position Honneth’s criticism of Habermasian discourse ethics. While discourse helps to appropriately consider some informed views on the good, it also excludes those who cannot articulate their normative expectations in the required sense. Discourse must then be modified or complemented with further research into normative experiences and expectations along the lines of the conditions for self-formation, discussed in the previous chapters.
10. See, for example, Honneth, “Post-traditional Communities”.
11. We will see below that Rawls too has tools available from his theory to reject those values and conceptions of the good that violate those considered judgements in which we have great confidence (e.g. judgements that racism is wrong). But the basis of this rejection is less stable.
12. Honneth, “Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation”.
13. Honneth, “Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation”, 218.
14. Given that there are different “republican traditions” (see, for example, Pettit, *Republicanism*), it makes sense to briefly elucidate the democratic theories Honneth refers to. Honneth identifies the Rousseauian conception of democracy as republican, where citizens have to practice specific political virtues. In Rousseau, they have to vote with the right attitude, gather information but refrain from forming factions (Rousseau, *The Social Contract*). The procedural conceptions shift attention from virtues to the right procedure of public deliberation. One example here would be Habermas and the discourse-ethical approach. Other accounts of republicanism define themselves through conceptions of freedom as freedom from domination and also focus less on specific citizen virtues (see e.g. Pettit, *Republicanism*).
15. Honneth, “Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation”, 219.
16. Honneth, “Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation”, 219.
17. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*.
18. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 222.

19. “social organism”, Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 223.
20. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 223.
21. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 225; see also Honneth, *Freedom's Right*.
22. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 228–29; also Honneth, *Freedom's Right*; see also List and Pettit, *Group Agency*.
23. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 230.
24. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*.
25. In fact, Zurn formulates his objection to Honneth's approach to economic justice in terms of reflexive democracy (see Zurn, Axel Honneth, and Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, 404–13).
26. Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*, 144.
27. Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*, 144–47.
28. This means cooperation motivated by self-interest along the lines Thompson proposes would suffice (Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*, 147).
29. See also the discussion of recognition hierarchies in the next chapter.
30. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 35 (italics mine).
31. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 36.
32. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 37. While Honneth manages to identify features shared by some theories of justice, not all liberal theories commit to those features (especially because of the influence of relational conceptions of autonomy).
33. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 37.
34. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 37–38.
35. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 38–39.
36. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 38–39.
37. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 46–48.
38. This position would almost demand that an entire society, with its customs and social practices, be replaced by new customs, practices and institutions—something that might work as a thought experiment but does not seem feasible. Even the reaction to unjust and inhumane regimes and cultures has been to build on some practices that are deemed normatively valuable and have those replace the inhumane or obnoxious practices.
39. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 47–48.
40. Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice”, 49.
41. ToJ, 386.
42. ToJ, 397.
43. See Bankovsky, “Social Justice”; Bankovsky, *Perfecting Justice in Rawls, Habermas and Honneth*. The defence of Rawls in the 2011 article focuses merely on defending him against Honneth's criticism and seems in parts as somehow uncritical of Rawls's position. Especially Rawls's ideas about the family are problematic and have been subject to criticism also from the perspective of feminists (e.g. Susan Moller Okin).
44. ToJ, 10–12, 102–5.
45. ToJ, 18.
46. ToJ, 41.
47. ToJ, 41.
48. ToJ, 42.
49. See Scanlon, “Rawls on Justification”, 140.
50. ToJ, 17.
51. Scanlon, “Rawls on Justification”, 140–41.
52. See, for example, Norman Daniels, *Justice and Justification*, 21–26.
53. ToJ, 40–42.
54. ToJ, 119.
55. Bankovsky, “Social Justice”, 100–102.
56. Bankovsky, “Social Justice”, 101.
57. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 54–58, esp. 56–57.
58. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlvii, 60.
59. Bankovsky, “Social Justice”, 100–101; ToJ, 386–91, 405–9.
60. ToJ.

61. Honneth, “Recognition between States”.
62. Honneth, “Recognition between States”, 150.
63. Honneth, “Recognition between States”, 148.
64. Max Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity*; Habermas, *Die postnationale Konstellation*.
65. FR, 332–35.
66. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*. Although, of course, vulnerability alone does not suffice for the moral dimension of misrecognition, there is an element of undermining moral agency (through misrecognition) and the idea of non-human agents as moral agents is highly controversial. Much more work would need to be done here, but the recognition framework remains promising (especially since there seems to be evidence to suggest cognitive capacities on the part of non-human animals).
67. This is not to say that the traditional problems are unimportant. They need to be investigated; recognition theory here is meant to complement, not to replace, analytic theories.

## *Chapter Eight*

# **Honneth, Postmodernism and the Future of Critical Recognition Theory**

Not only does Honneth engage with “analytic” political and social philosophy and the justice frameworks therein, but from “Human Nature and Social Action” on he has also engaged with Foucault, post-structuralist and deconstructivist approaches and critiques. As we saw, Honneth’s approach is influenced by Foucault’s conflict-theoretical notion of the social and by Derrida’s account of ethics, love, friendship and the demands of radical particularity. Honneth takes up critical positions against those streams in postmodernism that are anti-normative.

In this last chapter, I will focus on criticisms against Honneth which have been formulated by philosophers influenced by Foucault. I refer to this as “postmodernist critique”. One collection of criticisms concerns the idealisation of “recognition” and the implications of such an idealisation for recognition theory. I will show that the critique of idealisation is justified, but, in fact, a less optimistic account of recognition, and consideration of the negative consequences of our deep dependence on recognition, strengthens recognition theory. Related to a critique of optimism in Honneth is a second issue: the notion of progress in Honneth. The outcome of both discussions will be the suggestion of a slightly modified account. The third section will then consider the issue of a renewal and rethinking of the interdisciplinary project and an inclusion of decolonial and postcolonial theories. In the conclusion, I will suggest further that in light of various problems Honneth’s account faces, we should modify and reconsider the move from the analysis of misrecognition to the positive account of recognition.

## 8.1. IDEALISING RECOGNITION

This section focuses on a particular problem with Honneth's recognition theory: the purification of recognition from its problematic entanglements with power and domination. The problem has been raised in different ways by different people and has been touched upon in previous chapters.<sup>1</sup> The purification has consequences for Honneth's account of subject-formation and agency and implications for the normative validity of recognition as well. It might also present a problem for Honneth's methodological commitment to derive the normative framework from—rather than construct it independently of—social reality.

### 8.1.1. Emotions and the Normative Grounding of Recognition

As we have seen in previous chapters, Honneth derives the normative force of recognition from the experience of misrecognition, which points to deep-seated normative convictions. These normative convictions, in turn, are then justified with reference to arguments about the role of recognition for self-realisation based on philosophical and empirical considerations (including philosophical-historical theories, which will be discussed below). It might seem that the role of emotions as access to our pre-theoretical normative expectations is particularly important. If emotions are to track emancipatory interest and to indicate normative potential, it seems paramount that emotions themselves must not be the product of internalised structures of oppression. However, according to some theories, emotions are formed by social structures, including oppressive structures. They are the result of our interactions with others, which in turn are shaped by our social status.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Lois McNay criticises Honneth's “naturalised” view of emotions as unmediated access to authentic, pre-political normative convictions. In contrast, McNay argues that emotions are mediated; they are the result of interactions between individuals and society and are shaped by “pre-constitutive discourse”, which makes available to individuals the vocabulary through which they classify and interpret their own experiences, thus moulding and filtering emotional awareness.<sup>3</sup> While Honneth is clearly aware of the mediated nature of emotions (see, for example, “Decentred Autonomy”),<sup>4</sup> he underplays its significance in his theory. The concern about the social nature of emotions indicates further worry that there is no spontaneous, authentic agent with authentic normative expectations. The emancipatory potency of socialised normative expectations is then dubious. To some extent, Honneth will simply have to concede that our normative expectations are distorted by oppressive influences. However, he could point out that he does not rely solely on our particular moral expectations but aims to justify them with reference to context-transcending norms that are distilled from our

convictions and also externally justified (e.g. with reference to philosophical and empirical theories).<sup>5</sup> The stronger his justification of these context-transcending norms is, the less vulnerable he is to the dangers of internalised oppression expressed in emotional reaction. Given the practical aims of Critical Theory and its rejection of ethical authoritarianism, Honneth needs to connect to our deep-seated convictions and so must engage with them even though they are distorted. However, their normative value could be established independently of our private convictions with reference to context-transcending criteria. As we will see below, however, the context-transcending dimension of his theory seems to be problematic.

### **8.1.2. Agency**

Honneth envisages a close link between the experience of misrecognition and social action. Once a particular type of misrecognition is perceived of as typical of a group, individual members of this group are likely to be motivated to engage in collective struggles. Examples of this link between suffering and social action might be the consciousness raising among feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, previously mentioned, which led to an awareness of group-specific misrecognition (e.g. “sexual harassment”) and social action in terms of both social struggles and collective hermeneutic innovations (which allowed the conception of behaviours as “sexual harassment”), which in turn were essential for increased understanding of one’s own situation and of mechanisms of oppression.<sup>6</sup> For Honneth, then, suffering misrecognition can lead to critical awareness, which, in turn, can motivate social action. However, the link between suffering and collective political action is fragile partly because there are differences (and possible disconnections) “between recognizing injustice, identifying systematic domination and common interests, devising strategies for action and . . . feeling able to act”.<sup>7</sup> Such a disconnection could be due to a tendency in contemporary Western societies to privatisate suffering and then valorise private suffering, which McNay identifies. In the right TV talk shows and magazines, private suffering can lead to stardom. This “privatisation of suffering” prevents the realisation of a common interest and undermines the motivation.<sup>8</sup> The effect of privatising suffering is that misrecognition tends to be regarded as personal rather than social misrecognition, a reaction to a particular aspect of one’s unique personality. Thus, it does not lend itself to motivating collective action, as it is not perceived as a harm that affects a group.<sup>9</sup> The preoccupation with individual recognitive needs can diffuse awareness of collective suffering and potential for political action. In other words, as long as subjects think that the misrecognition they experience is due to particular, unique, features of their personality, they might neither try to find others with whom to engage in social struggles for recognition nor actually be able to identify a systemic source at the root of

their misrecognition. (Failure to locate the source of misrecognition in general social practices or attitudes further reduces the motivation to engage in social struggles.) Again, the history of the struggle against sexual harassment, while in the end successful, is instructive. Part of the reason why it took so long to recognise “sexual harassment” as an experience of misrecognition of individuals as members of specific groups (which groups exactly is contested) is that those affected tended to regard, for example, being inappropriately touched as something that happened to them as individuals (not as members of a social group—for example, “women”), a private (and in many cases shameful) experience. It required a climate in which cis-women (as at least one of the groups affected) spoke among themselves about very personal, intimate experiences anyway, as part of group meetings, in order for this type of misrecognition to become perceived as systemic subordination of specific groups which was then the appropriate target of social struggles.<sup>10</sup> Valorisation of private suffering acts as an additional motivation not to find others who are misrecognised in a similar way. Such considerations question the plausibility of moving from experiences of misrecognition and suffering to political action. While Honneth under-theorises the difficulties of moving from suffering to political action, his recognition-theoretical framework enables us to identify various breaks in the chain from suffering to action as social pathologies. The individualisation of suffering could present a pathology in line with the paradoxes of individualisation Honneth examines (see chapter 5), or it could be an example of a higher-order pathology described by Laitinen.<sup>11</sup> Where suffering does not lead to action because of a lack of hope that action could possibly succeed, we might take that lack of hope as either an individuation of internalised resignation (pathology) or an indication of systemic obstacles which need to be addressed as well and present a distinct misdevelopment or pathology of social structures. Similarly, some types of lack of knowledge about action might constitute a higher-order social pathology (this depends on whether there are social mechanisms that prevent knowledge).<sup>12</sup>

### 8.1.3. Subject Formation

A further aspect of idealising recognition is the overly harmonious account of self-formation in and through relations of mutual recognition. The image Honneth paints can be criticised from an empirical and philosophical standpoint. McNay, for example, draws on alternative theories in developmental psychology which suggest that individuals are affectively and cognitively fragmented, internally conflicted, and hence “they may interact defensively, aggressively, and violently”.<sup>13</sup> Petherbridge traces the idealisation of subject formation to an idealisation of love relations, which she already notes in Honneth’s appropriation of Hegel. She points out that Hegel, in contrast to

Honneth, conceives of love as a relation between unequal partners. It is not understood in terms of mutuality the way Honneth suggests. In Hegel, the importance of family for ethical life does not consist in reciprocal love between partners but in the education of children.<sup>14</sup> Of course, an update of Hegel is itself not problematic, but the issue for Honneth is not just one of Hegel scholarship. According to Petherbridge, Honneth's idealisation is at the root of an account of love in which "recognition becomes overburdened by one of its determinations as a stipulated precondition . . . of intersubjectivity".<sup>15</sup> In other words, love as mutual recognition is the condition of identity formation and all other intersubjective cognitive relations. More worryingly in our context, subject formation is now removed from the field of social conflict or power.<sup>16</sup> The problematic role of recognition in subject formation is also a focus of Judith Butler's and Paddy McQueen's criticisms. Both argue from a Foucaultian perspective. Here recognition produces particular subjects. It is only through being recognised as a particular, gendered subject that a person comes to exist. But at the same time, being recognised always means being recognised as something according to external cognitive norms. Thus, recognition is always an act of subject production and of subjugation. The subject is forced into external structures. The recognition of others is internalised so "we come to recognize ourselves through the 'hail' of others . . . being called into being as a subject before and under authority".<sup>17</sup> Given the norms that govern acts of recognition, recognition can "undo" the person by conferring recognition, or 'undo' the person by withholding recognition".<sup>18</sup> In the first case the subject is recognised as something the subject is not, and in the second case one does not become a subject at all. The idea that the act of recognition is always also an act of subjugation and that recognition is thus always complicit in domination does not seem to sit comfortably with the normative validity of recognition or the understanding of recognition as emancipatory.<sup>19</sup> Related to the worry of recognition as an act of subjugation is the worry that there is no self beyond the cognitive relations that constitute self-formation. The fear is that in Honneth relations of recognition are so pervasive in individuals' self-formation that in the end the individual cannot really be distinguished from the totality of cognitive relations.<sup>20</sup>

Before I address the concerns described in this section, it makes sense to point out that some criticisms—for example, Butler's and McQueen's—are most plausible if understood from within the recognition paradigm. From this position, we can understand the "undoing" as a form of misrecognition. The criticism then would state that every act of recognition can or does involve a degree of misrecognition. In the case of "undoing" a subject, we are confronted with complete misrecognition. We can thus, for example, understand the struggle against gender binary schemes as a struggle for the recognition of non-binary identities. These struggles are struggles for recognition of the

complexities of gender and against misrecognition of individuals in terms of a male-female divide. Honneth can explain the wrong of gender misrecognition and—pace McQueen—propose a remedy in recognition-theoretical terms. Here it is important to remember that recognition struggles can be struggles about the norms that govern recognition and the application of those norms, as well as about the various aspects of a personality that can be recognised. Admittedly, Honneth does not explicitly address struggles against the gender-binary norms; we can understand the struggle in the terms of his theory as a recognition struggle (against conflicting recognition claims).

More generally, it seems that the “power” dimension of recognition is a strength of the recognition paradigm, rather than a weakness. While it is true that Honneth does not fully appreciate and incorporate the complexity of power relations and their relation to recognition, his theory does allow a more comprehensive approach here.<sup>21</sup> As Petherbridge correctly points out, when Honneth discusses Foucault’s conception of power, he under-theorises the “productive” nature of power and focuses only on the “repressive” aspect. This means that he neglects the relationship between autonomy or freedom and power and the difference between power and domination.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Honneth fails to appreciate the idea of power as empowering, power as force.<sup>23</sup> The complexity of power relations and the constitutive and productive aspect of power have implications for subject-formation and the fragility of intersubjectivity, which Honneth’s approach does not properly account for,<sup>24</sup> but which help to emphasise the importance of recognition. We might at this point also make use of a Foucaultian distinction between “power” and “domination”.<sup>25</sup> Domination refers to relatively stable, fixed power relations, which are problematic for self-realisation and emancipation. While unstable power relations also impact on subjects’ ability to self-realise, they do so more temporarily. Their unstable and constantly contested nature means that power-relations can shift and so new possibilities for self-realisation appear. In terms of recognition theory this means that inasmuch as recognitive relations are always also power relations, the distribution of power is contestable and changeable. To some extent, some struggles for recognition, which Honneth understands as perpetual, can be contestations of this kind, though most struggles for recognition are probably understood as struggles against domination. The obstacle to emancipation is not power but domination. If we understand the criticisms above as claiming that recognition always involves domination, and acts of recognition are also always acts of total domination so that there is no “beyond domination”, then recognition theory would be in trouble. But this line seems questionable. First, while recognition involves an exercise of power, we can imagine this as an empowering exercise, as a “positive hailing”. Interpretations of the Fichtean “demand” as a call to cooperation and to agency suggest that possibility.<sup>26</sup> Positive hailing as invitation

to cooperate might take the form of a suggestion—for example, “Let’s do x”. This type of hailing seems to be in line with what Johann Gottlieb Fichte has in mind, as it affirms or attributes agency to the others, who can choose to cooperate (or not), without hailing into existence other (problematic) features or subjugating the subject. Of course, not all forms of hailing are of this kind. Second, we might question the idea of total domination with reference to the existence of struggles about the norms of recognition. And third, we might question the plausibility of the assumption of total domination in terms of the normative and emancipatory judgements we make. If the existence of a self is only possible as a result of total domination, then there is no problem with domination. There is no perspective from which we could criticise domination. Certainly, self-realisation would not be a critical standpoint here. While it is possible that we are self-deceived about our normative judgements, and, in reality, struggles for emancipation are only struggles of one interest group against another, there is no compelling reason to think so. Presumably, in order to give up deep-seated normative convictions, we need compelling reasons.

This does not mean, however, that we do not have to pay much more attention to the aspects of internalised oppression that also constitute the self and that are passed on through recognition. In other words, while recognition does have an emancipatory aspect or “promise”, it is also in danger of being infused with oppressive norms at any given moment. The idea that self-formation takes place in harmonious relations of care, respect and esteem is mistaken. McNay and others are correct to point out that, empirically speaking, acts of recognition are interspersed with aggressive acts of misrecognition, as well as consisting of empowering types of recognition and dominating types of recognition. Recognition theory must focus more on those dominating types of recognition to provide a better understanding of mechanisms of oppression and social pathogens. However, the wrong of those forms of recognition is best understood within a Honnethian framework of the normative, psychological and social role of recognition, and remedies are best formulated also in terms of this theory.<sup>27</sup> We might, of course, think that all acts of recognition have a dominating aspect. In this case, too, recognition still also has an emancipatory aspect but we need to track the dominating aspect and focus on this aspect much more in our theorising.

As mentioned in the beginning of the section, there is a danger that Honneth’s idealisation of recognition means that the account of recognition is far removed from the reality of recognition. This might be problematic for Honneth, given that he is committed to deriving normative values from social reality rather than conceive of them independent of this reality.<sup>28</sup> In response, Honneth can refer to the struggles in the different spheres. Insofar as his reading of them as recognitive struggles is correct, they present the required access to deep-seated normative convictions, which still need to be justified.

In other words, Honneth does not require that the actual practices embody recognition; it suffices that struggles point to underlying recognitive expectations.

## 8.2. RECOGNITION ORDERS AND PATHOLOGIES: SEXISM, RACISM AND CONFORMISM

There are other ways in which recognition is interfused with domination. The need for recognition, if taken seriously, means that in the context of capitalist society, or any society in which different types of labour are differently valued, there might be a competition for recognition. When not everyone has the opportunity to gain social esteem for contributions to the social good through labour, possibly because they lack skill or education or because they are in such precarious or low-paid jobs that insecurity and poverty prevent individuals from taking pride in and gaining self-esteem through the work, individuals must find alternative ways of gaining self-esteem and self-respect. As Gabriele Wagner and Timo Jütten show, this becomes especially pressing where an “erosion of esteem” also erodes respect.<sup>29</sup> For some people, alternative routes to self-esteem might consist in social engagement outside the labour market. Moreover, to some extent recognition in one sphere can offset recognition deficits in another sphere and help to distance oneself from misrecognition in this other sphere—for example, being esteemed by friends for particular talents can help distancing (and thus also critiquing) lack of social esteem for one’s work.<sup>30</sup> Wagner thus speaks of different “regimes of recognition”—that is, the different relations of recognition in different recognitive spheres, that allow room for critical evaluation of one regime (e.g. humiliation at work) from the perspective of another (love and “esteem” in friendship).<sup>31</sup> However, for many, such alternative avenues will not suffice and might not even be available. In such cases, individuals gain self-esteem through comparisons with those who are perceived as socially inferior. For example, those in low-paid employment who do not earn a living wage might gain self-esteem from comparisons with unemployed individuals, because, as opposed to the unemployed, the low-paid “at least” work. Often comparisons are then made with already marginalised groups. Sexism, racism, nationalism and prejudice against the poor, unemployed, homeless, subordinated genders and so on are then essential for one group to maintain self-respect and self-esteem.<sup>32</sup> Thus, systems in which not everyone can gain social esteem would tend to lead to recognition hierarchies, with the effect of reproducing racism, sexism and other forms of social hatred and misrecognition. The need for recognition and esteem, coupled with the fact that not everyone can receive social esteem, might also lead to “conformist behaviour and . . . subordination to relations of domination”.<sup>33</sup> We might

reconsider, for example, Honneth's analysis of "normalising recognition" in this context. Honneth thinks that "normalising recognition" is rather unproblematic because it refers to values that have already been revised. So, being "an obedient wife" is not a form of recognition that can easily be confused with recognition proper because the valuation is not in line with values that we affirm. But on the basis of unavailability of and need for recognition, this kind of valuation can perform exactly the role cognitive esteem should—it allows the recipient to take pride in the unique or excellent way in which she fulfills the role of obedient housewife. If this is the only esteem she receives, then it is no longer clear that we can easily distinguish it from "recognition proper" (quite apart from disagreements about values), but at the same time we would have a case of non-emancipatory recognition. Rather than presenting a problem for recognition theory, the example of a recognition hierarchy seems to be an example of a type of social pathology that plays into pathologies of democracy (see chapter 7).

The harmful nature of recognition hierarchies and normalising recognition can be understood from within the recognition paradigm. It is the recognition paradigm, then, that can identify these social wrongs and mount a social critique. Taking the need for recognition seriously means taking those dangers seriously and making sure that social labour is structured in a way in which esteem is possible. Jütten, for example, justifies a demand for "full employment" as well as restructuring of work with reference to recognition theory. Taking recognitive needs seriously also means to make sure that the different recognitive spheres remain independent enough to prevent erosion of respect caused by erosion of esteem and to allow individuals to gain sufficient recognition in some spheres to offset misrecognition in others. This involves a tracking of interferences between spheres as well as the formulation of quite radical policies to prevent such interferences. At this point, Jütten might interject and might claim that social esteem as a route to self-esteem always involves comparisons to others and so it will always involve hierarchies. The aim is to get "more" esteem than others. Even if self-respect could be protected from harm to self-esteem, self-esteem is always problematic. Moreover, closing the spheres off from each other, even if possible, also blocks the emancipatory effect that, for example, changes in the labour market have on relations in the family. These are not just effects on the institutional level but also effects on the type of or mutuality of recognitive relations operative in the family. Economic independence (even though it still involves gross inequalities) allows those gendered as female to be less vulnerable and meet their partners—especially those gendered as male—as equals, requiring mutual care (see chapter 4).

In response, one might say that it is not obvious (though clearly possible) that a universal recognitive need for esteem is always a need to have more esteem than others. In the situation of a restructured sphere or labour, where

everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the social good and receives esteem for their particular contribution, the comparative needs might be overcome. Subjects might be satisfied by having special, unique, significance for some (love) and be recognised for the excellence generally. At this stage, recognition theory does well for providing the normative basis to criticise the capitalist order and demand substantial changes to the way in which labour is structured. The desirability of interaction between spheres is complex because of conflicting needs. It would be important here to pay close attention to whether the effects of closing off spheres (if possible) are empowering or hinder necessary recognition.

Overall, it seems that recognition theory is the most appropriate theory with which to understand the pathological nature of social hierarchies, and it is also a powerful tool to prescribe a cure—that is, restructuring of institutions and structures.

### 8.3. PROGRESS

“Progress” plays a big role in Honneth’s approach. He relies on “moral progress” in several contexts: it serves as a standard for adjudicating conflicting recognition claims and it plays a significant role in the project of normative reconstruction in *Freedom’s Right*; as such, it is an important part of the narrative of “modernity” (as progress). This narrative of modernity, in turn, partly justifies the distinction of the different recognition principles. Progress is one justification of the formal conception of the ethical life. Honneth understands moral progress in terms of the realisation of social rationality, measured partly in terms of inclusivity and individuality—that is, expanding the scope of recognition vis-à-vis the aspects of a person that can be recognised and the number of individuals. At the same time, a commitment to progress might seem somewhat anachronistic in a context in which talk of “regression” increases. The contemporary idea of regression takes different forms. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* shocked with a collection of data arranged in a way that clearly points to socioeconomic tendencies towards a situation similar to that of Victorian times, where wealth is in the hand of “rentiers” who profit from their capital rather than labour, and labour, even well-paid work, is no longer a path to wealth.<sup>34</sup> The problems are both increased inequality and the abolition of any prospect of equal opportunity. Oliver Nachtwey expands on the notion of regression,<sup>35</sup> arguing that the increase in inequality is accompanied by social fragmentation and a movement towards “post-democracy”—that is, a political situation in which economic interests and not citizens determine politics.<sup>36</sup> The situation, for Nachtwey, is worse than it was in the Victorian age because increased individualisation has led to the destruction of the kind of collectives and commu-

nities that could protect individuals from the worse consequences of poverty and exploitation and eventually force social transformations. In addition to those current regressive tendencies, the catastrophes of the twentieth century suggest that we must, following Adorno and Horkheimer, abolish a commitment to (past) historical progress. Eschewing historical progress seems also required inasmuch as this notion of progress has served as justification for violent and murderous imperialism, the colonisation of “backward” non-European cultures.<sup>37</sup>

However, the idea of moral progress is indispensable for Critical Theory. Inasmuch as Critical Theory aims at social transformation, it must be able to present the desired social transformation as beneficial and hence progressive. As Maeve Cooke explains, the idea of progress allows Critical Theory to avoid constructivism and at the same time move beyond conventionalism and radical contextualism, and so be able to make context-transcending judgements without succumbing to authoritarianism.<sup>38</sup> Cooke holds that Critical Theory is committed to the idea of the possibility of emancipatory social transformation, and, as an emancipatory project, it is also committed to help bring about such transformation.<sup>39</sup> The idea of progress helps to orient social action, to focus on “beneficial . . . transformation”<sup>40</sup> and to distinguish beneficial from harmful or “neutral” changes. In order to avoid ethical authoritarianism, and to do justice to “situated rationality”—that is, the boundedness and limitations of human rationality—the notion of progress should refer to values that are connected to our deep-seated normative convictions. Further, in order to avoid authoritarianism (see chapter 5), judgements of progress and the normative framework must be contestable. To avoid conventionalism or radical contextualism, progress must be related to a context-transcending ideal. Cooke suggests that we understand progress in terms of representations of a “transcendental ethical object”—for example, a formal conception of ethical life. Progress is an approximation to this ethical object.<sup>41</sup> “Progress” thus requires that there is a “gap” between our context-transcending formal conception of ethical life and its particular realisation in our social reality.<sup>42</sup> Progress itself consists in narrowing the gap. Importantly, we do not have to postulate that the gap will ever be closed.<sup>43</sup> To sum up: Because Critical Theory aims at emancipatory social transformation, it requires a notion of progress to make sense of the very idea of emancipatory or beneficial social transformation. In order to avoid ethical authoritarianism, the notion of progress should relate to deep-seated normative convictions, and it should be open to contestation. One way of understanding progress is in terms of narrowing the gap between a formal conception of the ethical life, which is a context-transcending ideal, and its realisation in our social order.

Honneth’s view of progress seems to satisfy the demands Cooke outlines. He immanently derives his formal conception of ethical life from the deep-seated normative convictions of our contemporaries, expressed in experi-

ences of humiliation, disrespect and misrecognition. The formal conception of ethical life is such that we can formulate propositions that can be contested and we can gain practical guidance. Honneth also elaborates the gap between the ideal and its (immanent) realisation. Honneth posits a “surplus of validity”, which means both that our current social order does respond fully to the valid recognitive demands and also that the normative validity of recognition is such that no social order can completely realise them.<sup>44</sup>

For Cooke, the type of progress that Critical Theory must commit to is forward-looking progress—that is, progress directed at the future. In other words, Critical Theorists must commit to the possibility of future improvements. Honneth, however, relies on a conception of backward-looking historical progress—that is, a view of progress as a matter of fact about history (and hence history as a moral learning process).<sup>45</sup> He seeks to justify his formal conception of ethical life through a notion of historical progress: The formal conception of ethical life—that is, securing the social conditions of flourishing as self-realisation—is the result of a normative reconstruction of history. We understand history (or, better, we understand diverse human activities as history) from the perspective of the future realisation of human flourishing. History is a—ruptured—struggle to realise an ideal. The notion of historical progress (or backward-looking progress) allows us to make sense of diverse episodes, connect them into a narrative and thus provide a basis for orientation. This approach seems to open Honneth up to charges of Eurocentrism or imperialism.

Amy Allen argues that Honneth’s conception of progress is problematic because it implicitly, and against his intentions, reproduces imperialist attitudes. The imperialist implications of a commitment to progress are especially problematic given the link between progress and the normative foundations of Critical Theory.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, she demands that Critical Theory rethink its conception of progress and its foundation and nature of the normative dimension. She distinguishes between backward-looking progress (B-progress) and forward-looking progress (F-progress) with a view to disentangle the two notions and ultimately eschew B-progress. As mentioned above, B-progress views historical progress as a fact. According to this conception of past progress, our current values, social institutions and practices are the result of an ongoing moral learning process. These values, institutions and practices are thus superior to preceding “stages” in history. F-progress regards progress as a “moral-political imperative”. F-progress provides normative orientation towards possible emancipated futures and justifies demand for social transformation and social action with reference to these future possibilities.<sup>47</sup> Allen criticises several aspects of “moral progress” in Honneth. First, he fails to disentangle B- and F-progress and understands F-progress, emancipated future, in terms of B-progress—that is, Honneth understands future progress in terms of the values and normative framework

that are the results of historical moral learning. Further, Honneth grounds his normative framework, the formal conception of ethical life, in B-progress.<sup>48</sup> History is read as the progressive realisation of the formal conception of ethical life. On this reading of history, we understand the achievement of modernity in terms of the differentiation of different recognition spheres. This differentiation allows more individualisation and inclusiveness. Within modernity, the outcomes of social struggles for recognition constitute historical progress inasmuch as they have increased individualisation or inclusion (e.g. expansion of rights)—for example, by overcoming social pathologies and correcting misdevelopments.

In Honneth, B-progress plays a foundational role. But it is important to understand exactly what Honneth claims. “Moral progress” for him is a framework with which we can understand history. It is in many ways the result of reconstruction and not presumed.<sup>49</sup> Honneth arrives at the normative framework immanently by reconstructing the norms that govern those social institutions and practices that have received the support of members of a society such that these institutions have survived over time (e.g. law, family). To avoid relativism, conventionalism or radical contextualism, he justifies the framework with reference to their status in the moral learning process of humanity in a second step (B-progress). The commitment to progress is justified along Kantian considerations as a perspective we need in order to make sense of human action and in order to be able to take up a normative position on current events (for example, to be able to judge a radical change as good or bad). This commitment to progress, however, is not a commitment to a view of history as continuous progress or of the future as inevitably progressive. It is a (necessary) heuristic, which assumes progress as ruptured, fragile and not inevitable.

Allen argues that this commitment to B-progress—that is, to past historical progress as a fact—implies that we regard European enlightenment with its normative ideal of freedom and autonomy as morally superior to other values, including those of non-Western societies. She claims that from this perspective, those non-Western societies must be regarded as inferior or “backward” in terms of moral learning. We might at this stage feel reminded of Hegelian justifications of imperialism as “moral education”.<sup>50</sup> According to Allen, Honneth’s recognition theory—and Critical Theory in general—is in urgent need of “decolonisation”. This decolonisation would require a radically modified understanding of progress as forward-looking F-progress, disentangled from B-progress. Any commitment to B-progress must be abandoned. It might seem that this would mean that Honneth loses his universalist normative framework and he would have to reconsider the normative foundations of recognition theory. Allen’s criticisms certainly hit hardest when applied to Honneth’s method of normative reconstruction in *Freedom’s Right*. As we saw in chapter 6, Honneth reconstructs those shared values that

guide our social institutions and practices and are essential to and instrumental in social reproduction. The normative “validity” of these values is grounded in the notion of B-progress, so these values are regarded as superior to preceding values because they are the result of an overarching learning process.

Allen proposes to disentangle B- and F-progress, reconceive of F-progress in Adornian terms and reconsider the normative foundations. She draws on Adorno and Foucault. Adorno rejects the notion of B-progress, especially in light of the catastrophe of the twentieth century, but he does allow for the possibility of F-progress, even though we lack evidence of progress. For Adorno, we are as much unjustified in committing to B-progress as we are to denying the possibility of an emancipated future. Given the “no-right-living thesis”, we cannot conceive of un-dominated life from the context of total domination<sup>51</sup>—hence the notion of progress is formulated negatively in terms of avoiding the catastrophe (see below).<sup>52</sup> At the end of his essay on progress, Adorno writes, “Progress is not a conclusive category. It wants to cut short the triumph of radical evil not to triumph as such itself”.<sup>53</sup> He is aware of the danger of some conception of progress to be complicit in domination, but there is a chance that progress could be something else, some orientation towards avoiding evil. A few lines later, Adorno says that in the context of total domination, and “universal regression”—that is, in the context of contemporary society, “Progress is . . . resistance at all stages”.<sup>54</sup> The theme of avoiding (the) catastrophe is also central to the *Negative Dialectics*. Here Adorno proposes the New Categorical Imperative: “Hitler forced a new categorical imperative upon human beings in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen”.<sup>55</sup> The New Categorical Imperative is a universal demand that can and should not be discursively justified: “to treat it discursively would be outrage”.<sup>56</sup> Rather, “in it we bodily feel the arrival of the Ethical”.<sup>57</sup> This universal claim, which is based on bodily felt (particular) “abhorrence at the unbearable physical agony”,<sup>58</sup> together with the idea of progress as resistance, allows us to construct cautiously quite substantial practical guidance without a positive vision of emancipated future society.<sup>59</sup> Given that identity thinking and the negation of particularity and otherness are instrumental in the kind of catastrophe we must prevent, the protection of non-identity thinking in art is a path towards prevention. Emancipation from the appearance of second nature is also a step towards preventing catastrophe and opening a space for transformation. We can thus gain a normative orientation.

The Adornian view of progress as fragile possibility is unproblematic for Allen, although she is aware of Adorno’s extreme Eurocentrism in his writing. Imperialist attitudes are not implicit in a negativist view of F-progress, which is disentangled from B-progress.<sup>60</sup> In Adorno the enlightenment ideas

are seen not as highest possible human development but as a “mixture of domination and promise”,<sup>61</sup> as problematic. Adorno is aware of the intertwining of emancipatory potential and dominating actuality in reason and draws this out. Adorno’s negativism allows him to avoid the charge of relativism, since relativism would presuppose positive ethical laws.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the New Categorical Imperative is addressed in universal form. The negativism does not eschew universalist commitments. It is a universally binding commitment not to let catastrophes happen. As with other universal commands, the concrete application and interpretation might sometimes be contestable. However, we can also get some practical guidance. For example, letting individuals drown in the open sea because they are refugees trying to enter another continent or separating children from their parents because they are refugees trying to enter another country and keeping them in cages either constitutes a catastrophe or (at the very least) expresses those attitudes that allow and contribute to catastrophes. Insofar as societies allow such acts, they are repressive and do not resist evil; social transformations that would render acts like those impossible would be progressive.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, Allen proposes to “replace” a commitment to B-progress with a problematisation of the present or “problematising genealogy”<sup>64</sup> that draws out the entanglement of our normative ideals “with relations of power and domination”.<sup>65</sup> Special consideration should be given to mechanisms of systemic domination and exclusion.<sup>66</sup> F-progress should be conceived of as possibility and as “radical openness and open-endedness”<sup>67</sup> that results from the negativist approach. Further, Allen argues that the split between the first-person perspective—that is, the “perspective of a participant in a normative world” who must take norms as valid in order for them to qualify as reasons to act, which serves Honneth and Habermas to construct the normative dimension—and the third-person perspective of the observer, which serves as the perspective of an analysis of power, should be overcome.<sup>68</sup> This amounts to the demand to let go of idealised normativity, which is only possible if power relations are excluded from the normative reconstruction. The two perspectives need to be brought together into an ongoing dialectical relationship.<sup>69</sup> This in turn calls for and enables modesty and humility and the possibility of “unlearning” that is necessary for genuine dialogue with the other. Here Allen draws on decolonial theorists to set out criteria for the kind of dialogue that might allow decolonisation.

While I am sympathetic to the slight Adornian shift towards negativism, as I will outline in the conclusion, there are several problems with Allen’s arguments. One problem concerns the charge of imperialism. Allen insists that the Honnethian commitment to B-progress necessarily implies imperialist attitudes towards those cultures which do not share Western enlightenment ideals. They are necessarily judged to be morally inferior or backward.

However, there are ways of avoiding those undesirable implications by “localising” progress.<sup>70</sup>

There are two ways of localising progress which Allen considers: One, we could insist that when we speak of a moral learning process, we speak only of the history of a particular society or culture, so judgements are “intra-societal” judgements. European feudal societies are premodern because they developed into modern European societies. However, those societies that are not “historical antecedents” of European modernity cannot be called “pre-modern”. “Progress” is context transcending in a temporal way. Judgements about moral learning would thus be judgements about the development of one particular society without any implications on other societies. So for Western European societies, the extension of basic rights to children is progress when compared to a previous stages in historical antecedent societies where this group was excluded from having any legal rights. But there are two problems with this view. On the one hand, such an approach reproduces the misrecognition of the contribution of non-Western societies to Western development; on the other hand, this restrictive view is not context transcending in the way Honneth requires.<sup>71</sup>

Alternatively, Allen considers the notion of “progress in history” rather than “historical progress” as an acceptable form of localising progress.<sup>72</sup> Here we acknowledge that, for example, same-sex marriage presents a form of progress in a particular context that is in the context of a commitment to equality in Western societies. This form of progress sits comfortably with Allen’s own somewhat contextualist approach, which she deems necessary for open dialogue, but—much like the view above—it is too narrow to serve as a foundation for Honneth.

We could imagine a third way in which we can “localise” progress. We could consider specific aspects rather than entire societies. Thus, we might say that children’s rights constitute progress across all societies but that does not mean that those societies who grant those rights are *per se* more progressed than other societies. Progress in the area of children’s rights is compatible with an absence of (positive) developments in other areas or even regressive tendencies in other areas. While this notion of progress still commits me to a universally binding standard (e.g. Honneth’s formal conception of ethical life), it seems to avoid problematic judgements that downplay the contributions societies make to each other or otherwise justify the harm and violence done in the name of “progress”. Rather than reproducing imperialist attitudes, it seems that a commitment to something akin to either autonomy or dignity is necessary to make good of the demand for decolonisation in the first place. Honneth’s formal conception of the good life and the recognitive demands that follow seem a particularly good way of justifying the demand for decolonisation. The fact that the formal conception of ethical life is not solely justified by progress, and is thus not necessarily vulnerable to Allen’s

criticisms, undoubtedly helps here.<sup>73</sup> We have seen in previous chapters that his position is defeasible and vulnerable to empirical attacks, but it gains some strengths from the way in which the different dimensions work together as well as its plausibility.

Types of progress that are committed to universally binding norms are important, though we must guard against false interpretations of universalism (e.g. Eurocentric interpretations) since we have reasons to think that we must remain able to say that some changes (e.g. the prohibition of violence against different sexualities on the basis of that difference) constitute progress. Such changes constitute progress historically compared to contemporary societies in which such violence is legally tolerated or even encouraged.<sup>74</sup> On the one hand, Allen clearly wants to allow evaluative judgements along those lines. However, she wants to disentangle them from a commitment to B-progress. Judgements should take the form of “wrong” rather than “backward”. That is, societies which fail to prohibit rape are wrong in that respect, rather than less progressed or “backward”.<sup>75</sup> However, this insistence seems confused. The term “backward” is, of course, problematic, as it carries negative connotations beyond any notions of lack of progress or “social stagnation” or “regression”. In fact, the term seems to be a term of humiliation. Nonetheless, the notion of a society being less progressive in a certain aspect or stagnating is different from judging it to be wrong in that respect. The difference is an important one that should be maintained. If a society is wrong with respect to a practice (e.g. it fails to prohibit rape), and other societies are not wrong in that respect, then, compared to these latter societies, the former societies are less progressed in that respect. The judgement of “being less progressed” expresses not only a moral rightness but also, and more pressingly, attainability—that is, the idea that a better practice is available and can be instituted. It seems questionable that if one is committed to moral evaluation and to attainability, they should still refrain from the language of moral progress. The judgement of progress is due here to various circumstances: the commitment to the fact that the legal prohibition of this kind of violence is morally desirable as well as to the fact that there are some societies that have moved from a lack of legal prohibition to the introduction of a legal prohibition and so legal prohibition is attainable *now*.<sup>76</sup>

The possibility of making such judgements should be distinguished from the contestability of particular judgements. It might well be that, contrary to Honneth’s evaluation, the introduction of same-sex marriage does not constitute progress, but rather that the queer criticisms are correct and same-sex marriage reproduces heteronormative values through an expansion of the traditional institution of marriage. Thus, it might strengthen a problematic institution and simultaneously contribute to the fragmentation of a group of social actors, thus disempowering those who are already disempowered even further.<sup>77</sup> Whatever position one takes on the matter, however, does not

necessarily have implications on commitments to B-progress or the possibility of F-progress. If we think that the introduction of same-sex marriage does not constitute progress, it is still possible that progress has occurred and will occur in other areas. That most judgements are contestable is a strength for a theory that respects individual autonomy. Moreover, discursive contestation or struggle will expose new and different dimensions of our normative expectations and thus will contribute, itself, to progress.

In light of this brief discussion, there are several responses available to Honneth. One set of responses consists in defending his commitment to progress and the role progress plays in grounding the normative dimension of recognition theory. Honneth could also, alternatively, abandon his commitment to B-progress and emphasise other features of his theory to normatively ground it.

The preferred Honnethian response is a defence of progress, which is based on the distinction between the conception of progress and the abuse of the notion of progress. This line would reject the imperialist implications as forms of abuse and defend progress as a hermeneutic tool that allows us to understand history in such a way that it can provide normative orientation and allow us to understand complex human action (which would otherwise be fragmented and disordered).<sup>78</sup> Honneth might respond by distinguishing between the necessary implications of a commitment to B-progress and its uses. Here, Honneth might also draw on the very notion of freedom, as the highest value, which prohibits imperialist violations. As mentioned above, a commitment to recognition demands also a respectful and open engagement with other cultures. The European Enlightenment must be condemned for its complicity in the violation and exploitation of non-European nations and cultures, but the ideals themselves do not require such violence. Even though we can defend the notion of progress in this way, it makes sense to keep in mind that progress does not do all the work of normatively grounding recognition theory. As mentioned above, contestability is compatible with Honneth's intention, where progress is driven by recognition struggles which might also involve contestations about normative evaluations of changes. The notion of progress is plausible and defeasible.

Honneth could also abandon the commitment to progress. This is unlikely to be a line that Honneth himself would embrace, but it is possible because, as mentioned above, progress is only one way of normatively grounding the formal conception of ethical life. It operates alongside other arguments. Of course, abandoning one type of argument means recognition theory is now more vulnerable to problems that beset the other dimensions—for example, the standing of empirical theories. The empirical theories and philosophical arguments, their contestability notwithstanding, point to a universal human need of recognition. The formal conception of ethical life derived from cognitive needs is what F-progress aims for. A notion of F-progress would be

sufficient for adjudicating between recognition claims and for justifying the need for social transformation. Decolonisation would enter as both a recognition demand and a line of social critique.<sup>79</sup>

While there are no compelling arguments that would force Honneth to abandon commitment to B-progress, it is a problematic commitment. Apart from Allen's arguments, there are other problems—for example, ruptures or breaks. We cannot view history as continuous progress, and Honneth does not suggest we would. But if we cannot be sure that historical changes are always progressive, then our judgements about the progressive nature of particular changes are more controversial. While controversy is not *per se* a problem, because it might lead to exposure of normative convictions, it weakens the appeal of the argument. If we consider the therapeutic task of Critical Theory, then, while it should stimulate debate and reflection, it must first invite this debate by appearing plausible. If commitment to B-progress becomes the focus of contestation, this might distract from the actual social critique. Of course, part of contemporary critique might be to expose some socioeconomic developments as “regression”. *Regressive Modernity* is not a neutral assessment but a critique. It is thus important that we are able diagnose regress. Further, we understand regress in terms of progress, and so, arguably, we need to have a conception of and commitment to progress in order to make sense of regress. However, we do not need a commitment to B-progress. We can understand and evaluate regress with reference to F-progress. The possibility of F-progress itself is a necessary and far less problematic commitment. So overall, for different reasons from those suggested by Allen, and against Honneth's preferences, we might prefer to abandon a commitment to B-progress.

#### 8.4. CRITICAL THEORY AND DECOLONIAL THEORY

In the context of globalisation, decolonisation is a demand that Critical Theory cannot ignore. A provincial Critical Theory would not only be anachronistic but also fail to pick out some of the most pervasive mechanisms of oppression. In contrast to what we might conclude from the above discussion, decolonisation can be compatible with the core commitments to Frankfurt School Critical Theory. We can draw on Ina Kerner's conception of decolonial and (some) postcolonial theory as types of global Critical Theory in order to see how such a decolonisation could work. Kerner begins by arguing that some postcolonial and decolonial theories share the key tenets of the original Frankfurt School project. Decolonial theories are committed to emancipation; as such, they focus on an analysis of the mechanisms of oppression. They are committed to a relation between theory and practice, where theory is derived from social reality (not constructivist) and stimulates

and informs emancipatory transformations. Like Frankfurt School Critical Theories, some postcolonial and decolonial theories are interdisciplinary and committed to self-reflexivity.<sup>80</sup> Apart from shared basic commitments, Kerner also draws out ways in which decolonial theories can correct Frankfurt School theorising. Most obviously, by adding the perspective of the global other, decolonial theory corrects Eurocentric accounts of history and false (Eurocentric) interpretations of universalism. Moreover, the perspective of the other provides additional insight into the nature of power (“coloniality of power”) and the mechanism of knowledge production. It thus adds important dimension to our understanding of oppressive mechanisms. Furthermore, it addresses global power asymmetries and interdependencies from the standpoint of the other, correcting Eurocentric theorising.<sup>81</sup> I should point out that the notion of correction does not require a commitment to standpoint epistemology (if this is understood as epistemic superiority of the other *per se*) or to the notion of a “universal subject”. Rather, as mentioned above, the other as subject of specific types of oppression offers insights into oppression and must be taken as an epistemic authority especially in those areas. Those insights often are the types that more privileged subjects tend to lack. Of course, in light of the previous discussion (especially discussions in chapter 5), subjects of oppression are not always aware of the oppression and so can be mistaken in that way. Overall, the correction is the product of a dialectic between different perspectives here, and we might read Allen’s intervention as an example of such a dialectic relationship. In line with Critical Theory’s emancipatory aims, the corrected epistemic perspective and new knowledge must also have material impact and contribute to the abolition of oppression and repressive and exploitative structures.<sup>82</sup>

Honneth, who is sympathetic to Dewey’s epistemic arguments in favour of inclusive discourse, must be especially committed to incorporating the corrective perspective of the other. Honneth could thus regard decolonial and postcolonial theories as core “disciplines” in the interdisciplinary project. They would stand in an ongoing dialectic relation to other disciplines and approaches, correcting historical, social, political and philosophical accounts. This suggestion is also in line with calls for a reform of the interdisciplinary setup. The world in which Horkheimer proposes the interdisciplinary project with its core disciplines has radically changed. New disciplines are required in response to changes (for example, globalisation).<sup>83</sup>

## 8.5. CONCLUSION

Overall, it seems that the recognition framework as such is a suitable framework for analysing social pathologies and experiences of injustice. For those purposes, acknowledging and theorising the interfusion of recognition and

power is both a necessity and a strength. We gain an additional dimension of explanatory value and more appropriate guidance for emancipatory action the better we understand how the dominating aspects of recognition operate in everyday life and especially pathologies. Further, it is important to keep in mind the provisional and contested nature of any recognition claims, and especially of positive claims we might derive from the fact of cognitive needs. It might be that the best way to use the recognition framework is as a framework for the location and explication of oppression and thus to focus on misrecognition. Further, because it helps to interpret experiences of oppression it also frames discourse about practical solutions—which themselves should be taken more as suggestions in struggles against oppression. In other words, there are indications that the recognition framework is most compelling in its negativity; problems arise when it is used to formulate positive guidance (principles)—since then the criticisms of the recognition theory discussed above, while not compelling on their own, are plausible. A reaction would be to see the positive formulations as contributions to a discourse within the recognition framework—thus they are more defeasible, more provisional than the framework itself. This does not weaken Honneth's theory, but rather emphasises aspects of his theory that have moved into the background, such as the respect for people's own normative convictions, the importance of discourse but at the same time the need to reform discourse so as not to exclude those less privileged. Honneth's work on exclusion becomes central for further modifying the notion of discourse, which should not be understood in Habermasian terms but must incorporate other forms of communication (expressions of misrecognition or even silence).

While a commitment to universalism and to the possibility of progress are important for Critical Theory and distinguish it from other forms of social criticism, recognition theory must also open itself up to decolonialisation. In some ways it seems well suited to decolonial dialogue, as the evils of colonialism and ongoing (if implicit) imperialist attitudes and (socioeconomic) structures can be understood in terms of all dimensions of misrecognition—this is an area that must become a more central part of the theory, especially if we also acknowledge the fact of intertwined and co-determining histories. A proper understanding of our practices involves an understanding of how much they have depended, and still do, on the exploitation and humiliation of other societies. And obviously, while misrecognition as a framework helps explicate and identify those wrongs, positive practical suggestions must become part of recognitive discourse. For this purpose we might rethink the interdisciplinary setup of Critical Theory and widen the core disciplines to include decolonial and feminist approaches. In other words, part of the appearance of Eurocentrism and conservatism are due not so much to the recognition framework that Honneth works out but to his particular applica-

tion. The framework itself is appropriate for and even demands wider application.

All in all, Honneth's social philosophy amounts to a revitalisation of the project of the Frankfurt School Critical Theory, including a revival of the social pathology framework as a tool of social analysis (and therapy). This allows Honneth to make important and timely contributions by being in a position to explain the complicity of subjects in their own oppression. Moreover, his detailed account of implications of misrecognition for human psychology as well as moral agency allow Honneth's theory a universalist moral ground which he persuasively links back to pre-theoretical normative experiences and thus to social reality. His universalism, moreover, is of a kind that values concrete particularity (love and esteem). Together with his account of pathology, his account of injustice as misrecognition offers powerful social criticisms.

As mentioned above, while the criticisms presented here do not compel Honneth to abandon any of his commitments, a more robust and effective—yet still essential Honnethian—recognition theory could result from incorporating the criticisms and modifying the approach slightly. There are three modifications in particular that might improve the approach.

First, as mentioned above, the commitment to past progress (B-progress) is problematic for several reasons and not necessary to normatively ground recognition given Honneth's philosophical anthropology. We might even replace the commitment to B-progress with a commitment to something like Adorno's New Categorical Imperative (NCI). The “negativist” commitment to prevent catastrophe does not seem very controversial. While Adorno would reject a recognition theory<sup>84</sup> (as recognition theory could be derived from such a commitment to prevent catastrophes), misrecognition, when it undermines agency or dignity, might facilitate catastrophe—and certainly does not resist it. Honneth would probably reject this additional normative ground, which—while compatible with recognition—is external to it. However, the commitment to the NCI has the advantage of offering a further (relatively uncontroversial) standard to appeal to when, for example, adjudicating between conflicting recognition claims—though here, too, interpretations of “catastrophe” are likely to be contested. The move to negativism in the sense just outlined, to prevent misrecognition, would strengthen the theory, given that the account of misrecognition is compelling. Here it is worth pointing out that Honneth's social analysis is persuasive when he criticises social structures because they prevent relations of recognition.

Second, recognition theory should focus more on the problematic aspects of recognition—that is, the infusion of recognition with power and domination. This enhances the persuasiveness and yields additional insight into oppressive mechanisms (as seen in discussion above).

Third, recognition theory should broaden its interdisciplinary frame to include decolonial theories in the way Kerner outlines. This not only allows us to understand “domestic” oppressive mechanisms better—that is, the effects of remnants of colonialism on groups within (European and non-European) countries—but also informs us about the global nature of (some forms of) oppression and domination and provides additional information about problematic forms of power. As mentioned above, the inclusion of decolonial theories seems in line with Honneth’s commitments.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, McNay, “The Trouble with Recognition”; McNay, *Against Recognition*, 2015; Petherbridge, “Introduction: Axel Honneth’s Project of Critical Theory”; Butler, *Undoing Gender*; McQueen, “Honneth, Butler and the Ambivalent Effects of Recognition”.
2. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 138–41; also “The Trouble with Recognition”, 279–81.
3. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 138–41; also “The Trouble with Recognition”.
4. But for McNay, even the account of “decentred autonomy” is problematic, because here Honneth fails to acknowledge that creative capacity does not necessarily lead to morally desirable results (evil can also be the effect of individual creativity); see McNay, *Against Recognition*, 143.
5. It is important, as suggested previously, to consider the different strands of Honneth’s arguments together, as any one argumentative strategy on its own does not provide compelling grounds for the normative value of recognition. See also Zurn’s early criticism (Zurn, “Anthropology and Normativity”).
6. See Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.
7. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 140; see also Laitinen, “Social Pathologies, Reflexive Pathologies, and the Idea of Higher-Order Disorders”.
8. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 140.
9. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 133, 140.
10. See, for example, Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.
11. Laitinen, “Social Pathologies, Reflexive Pathologies, and the Idea of Higher-Order Disorders”.
12. Laitinen, “Social Pathologies, Reflexive Pathologies, and the Idea of Higher-Order Disorders”.
13. McNay, “The Trouble with Recognition”, 276.
14. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 92–93, 108–9.
15. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 109.
16. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 109. Simultaneously, given that all intersubjective relations are based on these primary forms of mutual recognition, conflict between subjects can now be understood as occurring on a recognitive basis—that is, in a context in which the other has always already been recognised, and, as such, we can be certain of “minimal normative consensus” (113). The primary recognitive relation or “pre-contractual relations of mutual recognition” (Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 42) are different from the notion of “antecedent recognition” in *Reification*. The latter could take the form of outright hostility. However, the charge against Honneth here seems unjustified inasmuch as he draws out the conditions of a political community at this point, which must be able to reach minimal consensus based on mutual recognition of each other as bound by the same laws (Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 42).
17. McQueen, “Honneth, Butler and the Ambivalent Effects of Recognition”, 55.
18. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2. See also McNay, *Against Recognition*, 133, for the “normalising” and thus oppressive implications of recognition.

19. McQueen claims that correcting the “undoing” of a person through recognition is not possible simply through the means available to Honneth (i.e. expanding the scope of recognition).

20. McNay, *Against Recognition*, 143.

21. See Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 38–40. Petherbridge traces this simplified account of power and the idealisation of recognition as power-free to Honneth’s appropriation of Foucault. Petherbridge identifies an early tendency in Honneth to underestimate the complexity of power in his critique of Foucault. As we saw in chapter 2, Honneth identifies distinct stages in Foucault’s theory of power rather than allowing the simultaneous interplay of two different tendencies, an action-theoretic and system-theoretic notion of power.

22. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 41–42. According to Petherbridge, power relations in Foucault are horizontal relations between free subjects who try to influence each other so that power increases with freedom, as such power positions are fragile and contested (76).

23. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 69, 71.

24. Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, 78.

25. Allen, “Emancipation without Utopia”, 517.

26. Seiriol Morgan in personal conversation.

27. To some extent, his essays on “Recognition as Ideology” as well as “Organized Self-Realisation” and (with Hartmann) “Paradoxes of Capitalism” can be seen as responses to that type of critique. In those essays, Honneth shows an awareness of the entanglement of recognition with power and domination. However, even in those essays he (a) is at pains to distil a view of recognition proper which can be distinguished from other types of ideological recognition and also (b) underestimates how much the very need for recognition that he correctly identifies contributes to the reproduction of oppression because it deems individuals vulnerable to all forms of recognition (including ideological recognition). Both moves are problematic.

28. See McNay, *Against Recognition* and “The Trouble with Recognition”.

29. Jütten, “Dignity, Esteem, and Social Contribution”, 268. See also Wagner, “The Two Sides of Recognition”, 359; Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*. Jütten offers a very thorough analysis of the link between the erosion of esteem for a group (e.g. the unemployed) and the threat to respect (e.g. cutting welfare). Both Wagner and Jütten argue that, in a context of division of labour, social esteem is not distributed equally and so there are “status hierarchies” of esteem. Jütten also presents a detailed and compelling account of the contradictions involved in trying to gain social esteem and self-esteem when one perceives oneself and is perceived by others as “one of the masses”—that is, an unskilled worker. Unfortunately, I cannot here do justice to his excellent insights but must constrain myself to the core of his argument as it affects Honneth.

30. Wagner, “The Two Sides of Recognition”, 360–61.

31. Wagner, “The Two Sides of Recognition”, 360–61. Jütten (“Dignity, Esteem, and Social Contribution”, 264) also considers other ways in which one can gain self-esteem, but such alternatives do not fully replace work-related social esteem.

32. Jütten, “Dignity, Esteem, and Social Contribution”, 273–78.

33. Wagner, “The Two Sides of Recognition”, 366.

34. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

35. Nachtwey, *Die Abstiegsgesellschaft*.

36. Nachtwey also draws on Crouch, *Post-Democracy*.

37. We find such justification in different ways in Hegel and Locke, for example.

38. Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 14–15.

39. Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 13; see also chapter 5.

40. Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 13.

41. The formal conception of ethical life should disclose the “transcendental ethical object” in such a way that the image appeals to affect and motivation and thus provides practical normative orientation. Moreover it must also allow the formulation of propositions, validity claims, which are the object of contestation (Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 119–21). It is necessary that we can formulate claims based on the conception of ethical life and contest these claims if we want to avoid authoritarianism and want to do justice to situated rationality and the autonomy of individuals.

42. Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 98.
43. This allows us to avoid “finalism”, the idea that complete knowledge and a perfect social order are attainable (Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 162), and thus appreciates the “finitude of human knowledge, contingency of human life and history, and creativity and freedom of human will” (163).
44. There are various criticisms Cooke makes of Honneth, which, for reasons of brevity, I cannot consider here.
45. Of course, the formal conception of the good life can also be applied to history to make judgements about past transformation, but this is not all Honneth does.
46. It should also be pointed out that Allen criticises the second, third and fourth generations of Critical Theorists, so the objections do not just attach to Honneth.
47. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 12.
48. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 81. We can find evidence for the historical grounding throughout Honneth’s works, from *The Struggle for Recognition to Redistribution or Recognition?* and most explicitly in *Freedom’s Right*.
49. This interpretation is supported by Honneth’s reconstruction of a hermeneutic justification in Kant, as well his emphasis that we can only take a certain position on the present if we assume progress. Clearly, then, progress is a tool for interpretation. This interpretation, however, is itself not arbitrary but is required for practical and theoretical reasons (it provides orientation and satisfies cognitive demands). See Honneth, “The Irreducibility of Progress”.
50. This attitude of moral superiority of Western societies is implicated in racist and xenophobic attitudes today as well as the justification or apparent acceptability of global structures that allow the continuous exploitation of the “global south” by the “global north”.
51. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 18 (see also 100).
52. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 144 (“Progress”).
53. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 160.
54. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 160.
55. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 358 (English edition, *Negative Dialectics*, 365). See also Freyenhagen’s excellent reconstruction of an Adornian ethics: *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy*.
56. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 358.
57. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 358.
58. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 358.
59. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 175–76; Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*; Freyenhagen, *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy*.
60. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 188.
61. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 192.
62. See also Allen, *The End of Progress*, 216–17.
63. Obviously these types of treatment are also condemned by the recognition framework as they obviously qualify as misrecognition (of basic needs) as discussed in chapter 3.
64. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 205.
65. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 204; see also 196.
66. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 204.
67. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 205.
68. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 207.
69. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 208.
70. It should be noted that Adorno would object to any kind of “localising” progress. Progress for him must be “universal progress” of the “universal subject”—that is, humanity (Adorno, *Critical Models*, 145).
71. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 115.
72. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 228–29.
73. However, Honneth must be careful to not base his philosophical anthropology on Eurocentric assumptions. In the same way, he needs to test psychological and other theories. The next section will suggest what such testing might look like.
74. Obviously legal recognition of something as a wrong does not amount to prevention. It is but a first step.
75. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 103.

76. Attainability is of course not only a matter of achievements of some societies, it can also be technologically determined. In that way there is a link to Marcusian views of emancipation and real potentialities. For reasons of space, I cannot follow this topic up here.

77. See Allen's discussion of the queer critique of gay marriage (Allen, *The End of Progress* 97–103).

78. This line is indicated by Honneth's (verbal) contribution to the symposium on "Progress, Regression and Social Change", which took place at the Humboldt University in Berlin during June 2017.

79. Kerner, "Postcolonial Theories as Global Critical Theories".

80. See Kerner, "Postcolonial Theories as Global Critical Theories".

81. Kerner, "Postcolonial Theories as Global Critical Theories".

82. Of course, there are also cases where the issue is less one of ignorance on the part of the more privileged subjects than a wilful ignoring, a "looking the other way". Here confrontation with ongoing effects of oppression might also help.

83. See Nobre, "La controverse sur le langage commun de la collaboration interdisciplinaire".

84. See, for example, van den Brink, "Damaged Life: Power and Recognition in Adorno's Ethics", for an outline of Adorno's suspicions vis-à-vis such a recognition theory because, for Adorno, genuine recognition is, at most, momentary.

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# Index

Adorno, Theodor W., x, 1, 15–19, 22, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 46, 105, 117, 132, 203, 206–207

achievement principle, 82, 91

adjudication, 83–84, 95, 97, 174, 202, 211

alienation, 19, 28, 77, 81, 116, 122

Allen, Amy, 204–208, 209, 211

anti-democratic sentiments, 171, 176, 185, 189

authenticity, 114, 115, 135, 194

authoritarianism, 120, 203; epistemic, 118; ethical, 118, 130, 133, 195

autonomy, 2, 14, 20–21, 36, 37, 55, 63, 67–68, 74, 75, 79, 80, 82, 83, 87, 90, 94, 97, 112, 113–114, 120, 133, 135, 172, 173, 174, 175, 179–180, 181, 182, 186, 189, 198, 205, 210; decentred, 76, 110

Bueno, Arthur, 118–119

Butler, Judith, 43, 110, 111, 197

capitalism, 14, 16, 17, 80, 88–89, 99, 109, 117, 129, 137, 138, 139–140, 141, 142, 147, 149, 156, 158, 161, 163, 171, 187, 202; bourgeois, 8–9, 32–33; post-liberal, 8, 32, 33

class, 75–76, 85–86, 95, 151–152, 158, 161

communication, 20, 21, 40, 78, 85, 151, 160

communicative action, 22, 32, 37, 39

communicative understanding, 32, 33, 35, 37

communicative rationality. *See* rationality

communicative relations, 32, 37, 39, 150

communitarianism, 171, 172, 173–174

community, 55, 58, 77, 143, 148, 151–152, 173, 174, 176, 177, 202–203; true, 139, 140

conception of the good, 96, 142, 175, 181, 185

conflict, 54–55, 60, 83, 95, 147, 178, 197

constructivism, 130, 182

conventionalism, 130, 133

Cooke, Maeve, 118, 203, 204

critique: environmental, 109–110; ideology, 105; immanent, 43, 48, 131, 156–157; normative, 28; radical, 131, 132, 133; reconstructive, 46, 47–49; social, 38, 104, 118, 123, 129, 211; transcendental, 43; world-disclosing, 7, 15, 44–45, 49, 120

decolonial theories, 188, 193, 207, 211–212, 213, 215

democracy, 77, 91, 141, 149–157, 171, 172, 174–178, 182; deliberative, 154, 162

democratic pathologies, 178

democratic public sphere, 150–154, 175

democratic will-formation, 149, 160, 175

deprivation, 85–86

descriptive dimension, 53, 67, 73, 84, 87, 98

Dewey, John, 65, 151, 160, 176, 177, 212

diagnosis, 103, 104, 107, 108, 118–119

*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 10, 15–19, 43

dignity, 58, 82, 83, 94

discourse ethics, 78–79, 95, 162

disrespect, 40, 62, 65, 66, 76, 85, 107–108, 188, 204

distribution paradigm, 179, 180, 186

domination, 7, 10, 16–19, 22, 28, 37–38, 39, 41, 42, 45, 47, 62, 85, 92, 105, 111, 117, 132, 142, 161, 162, 163, 198–199, 200, 206, 207; of nature, 6, 32, 189; social, 8, 34

economic sphere, 64, 66, 75, 84, 86, 88–90, 98, 161

emancipation, 5, 6, 17, 36, 37, 38, 45, 49, 53, 61, 68–69, 84, 88, 89, 92–93, 103, 104, 105, 106, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 122, 133, 162, 178, 194, 198, 199, 203, 207; emancipatory action, 7, 10, 18, 31, 35, 39, 42, 73, 120, 121, 146, 213; emancipatory interest, ix, 14, 20, 21, 29, 30, 160; (future) emancipated society, 8, 9, 10, 11–12, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 46, 99, 107, 132, 159, 204–205, 206

entrepreneur, 92, 113–114

epistemic dimension, 105, 151

equality, 82, 83, 132, 150, 158, 163

equal participation, 151, 152, 154

esteem, 55, 56, 58, 66, 76, 80, 81, 83, 89, 91, 112, 148, 174, 177, 188, 189, 190, 199, 200–201

ethical good, 74

ethical life, 56, 90–94, 130, 137, 149, 174, 186; formal conception of, 69, 96, 177, 182, 202, 203–204, 205, 208–209, 210–211

ethical sphere, 78

ethical theory, 84, 96

ethics, 78, 85, 93, 94, 96–97, 130

explanatory power, 62–63

exploitation, 85–86, 93

family, 56, 57, 58, 75, 90, 91–92, 93, 141, 149, 162

feminism, 66, 84, 91, 93, 109, 159, 162, 186, 195

Foucault, Michel, 40–43, 193, 198, 206

fragmentation, 147, 153, 155, 202

Fraser, Nancy, 58–59, 84–98

freedom, 8, 9, 14, 55, 91, 106, 113, 179, 180, 198, 205, 210; individual, 132, 137, 138, 142, 145, 147, 148–149, 153, 159, 160; negative, 57, 134–135, 136, 140–141, 142, 143, 153, 157, 158; personal, 136, 137; reflexive, 134, 135–136; social, 77, 92, 129–164

French Revolution, 150, 158, 160

friendship, 54, 57, 58, 78, 79, 81, 91, 136, 193

gender, 90, 92, 93–94, 112, 197–198, 200, 201

Habermas, Jürgen, x, 10, 12, 19–22, 35–40, 43, 46, 66, 78, 88, 95, 105, 106, 121, 150, 152, 171, 175, 186, 207

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, xi, 2, 10, 13, 27, 29, 41, 46, 54, 55, 56, 57–58, 59, 63, 67, 80, 85, 104, 106, 129, 130, 132, 134, 137, 138, 140, 141, 143, 145, 149, 158, 196–197

heteronomy, 136, 147, 160

Horkheimer, Max, ix, x, 1–10, 11, 15–19, 22, 31–32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 40, 41, 45, 48, 105, 117, 132, 203, 212

humiliation, 107, 108, 204

idealisation, 91, 111, 193, 194, 196–197, 202, 207

identity thinking, 16–17, 122–123, 206

ideological recognition, 111–114, 115

ideology, 7, 21, 28, 105, 117

imperialism, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 210, 213

inclusivity, 55, 69, 80, 83, 97, 160, 161, 202, 205

individualisation, 55, 69, 80, 83, 97–98, 202, 205; paradox of, 111, 148, 196

inequality, 150, 163, 202

injustice, 37, 39, 40, 56, 73, 76, 83, 84, 85–87, 89, 90, 91, 94, 95, 98, 103, 104, 105, 108, 122, 123, 149, 185, 212, 214

interdisciplinary, 9, 10, 32, 46, 47, 212, 213, 215

interest, 4, 7, 11, 19–22, 41, 56, 147, 158, 161

intramundane transcendence, 30, 49, 73, 194

justice, xi, 29, 43, 54, 66, 69, 73–99, 134, 141–157, 172–173, 179, 180–181, 183, 184, 185, 186–187, 188; framework, 122–123, 193; theory of, 28, 74–84, 95, 96–98, 130, 135, 171, 186, 187

Jütten, Timo, 137, 149, 200, 201

Kant, Immanuel, 2, 7, 8, 16, 46, 55, 67, 80, 82, 85, 135

labour, 38–39, 90–91, 112, 136, 139, 202; alienated, 138, 140; market, 92–93, 113, 114, 115, 146–149, 200, 201; movements, 147

legal sphere, 56, 57–58, 82, 90, 142

liberalism, 85, 134, 142, 171, 172, 174, 178

lifeworld, 22, 35–36, 37–39, 88

loss of personality, 9, 16, 18, 32–33

love, 55, 56–57, 58, 61, 62, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 90, 91–92, 93, 188, 193, 196–197, 199, 200

Marcuse, Herbert, x, 1, 10, 11–15, 19, 22, 38, 105, 117

marginalisation, 85, 93

market, 82, 88, 89, 137, 142–149; socialism, 149, 162

Marx, Karl, 12, 13, 29, 46, 106, 129, 137, 138–141, 147, 158, 162, 163

materialism, 9–10, 11

McNay, Lois, 75, 91–92, 111, 194, 195, 196, 199

McQueen, Paddy, 111, 197

Mead, George Herbert, 46, 54, 59–61, 63, 68

media, 152–153

misrecognition, 54, 58, 59, 62, 64, 65, 67, 69, 75, 76, 94, 95, 99, 107–108, 138, 194, 195–196, 200, 201, 204, 210, 213

moderate value realism, 58, 64, 113

modernity, 66, 80–81, 104, 205

moral agency, 67, 69, 76, 90, 96, 97, 99

moral dimension, 67, 73, 98

moral injury, 63, 75, 98

morality, 53, 55, 61, 63, 65, 67, 73–99, 108, 136, 186

moral theory, 75–81, 84, 94–97, 98–99

Nachtwey, Oliver, 202

negativism, 58, 75

New Categorical Imperative, 206, 207, 214

normalising recognition, 111, 112–113, 201

normativity, 39–40, 42, 47–48, 54, 57, 89–90, 93, 98–99, 108, 143, 160, 173, 174, 186–187, 194–195; normative dimension, 19, 35, 37, 53, 55, 59, 65, 67, 73, 81, 82, 84; normative expectations, 53, 59–60, 65–66, 69, 98, 144, 194; normative foundation, 11, 36, 65, 67, 68, 179, 204, 205, 206; normative reconstruction, 129, 130–133, 141, 144, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 156, 180, 183, 202, 204, 205, 207; normative revolution, 131, 132, 133; normative self-understanding, 32, 34, 77, 84, 88, 97; normative surplus, 30, 49, 204; normative theory, 67, 73, 79, 129

norms, 97–98, 131, 132, 133, 194–195, 198

object-relations theory, 61

oppression, 8, 10, 37–38, 46, 92, 93, 111, 112, 114, 117, 132, 212, 213, 214; internalised, 195, 199; mechanisms of, 11, 31, 73, 87, 104, 105, 120, 122, 195, 199, 214, 215

oppressive structures, 73, 93, 105, 194

original position, 172–173, 183–184, 187

participatory parity, 86–87, 97, 98

pathology paradigm, 105, 122–123

Petherbridge, Danielle, 43, 57, 196–197, 198

philosophical anthropology, 107, 149

political: dimension, 73, 98, 176; disenchantment, 155, 157, 171, 178; philosophy, 28, 134, 171–190, 193; realism, 156; theory, 84, 97–98

postmodernism, 67, 78, 193  
 power, 9, 20, 40, 41–42, 54, 92, 93, 187–188, 198, 207  
 practical dimension, 53, 67, 73, 84  
 praxis, 103; and theory, 5, 7–8, 159, 178  
 pre-theoretical, 53  
 proceduralism, 135, 172, 175, 178–181  
 progress, 32, 57, 67, 131, 160, 178, 189, 193, 202–211; moral, 36, 48, 54, 55, 64, 66, 69, 83, 84, 91, 99, 113, 202, 203, 204–205, 209  
 public deliberation, 150, 154  
 public discourse, 152, 153, 175, 176, 177  
 racism, 86, 89, 109, 152, 159, 200  
 rationality, 2, 9, 13, 63, 79–80, 120, 207; communicative, 10, 22, 36, 106; “deformed”, 105–106, 108, 114, 115, 117; instrumental, 16, 17, 19, 22, 34, 35; rational society, 4, 8, 10, 18, 19; rational universal, 106; social, 48, 106, 130  
 Rawls, John, 171–190  
 recognition, 40, 103, 138–139, 146, 148, 151, 154, 160, 171, 180, 181, 186; antecedent, 55–56, 109, 110–111; hierarchy, 200, 201; normative, 56, 63; paradigm, 85; struggle, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 83, 91, 98, 108, 155, 195–196, 197–198; spheres of, 54, 57–58, 81–82, 90, 93–94; -theoretical account of justice, 74, 75, 88–90, 97–98, 99, 187; theory, xi, 27, 43, 53–69, 73–99, 104, 177, 179, 187–189, 193–215; types of, 55–59  
 reflective equilibrium, 182, 183–184, 185  
 regression, 7, 33, 112, 117, 120, 202, 206, 211  
 regressive anthropogenesis, 18  
 reification, 28, 108–111, 117; and objectification, 108–109, 189  
 repression, 41, 42, 112, 198, 207  
 respect, 56, 57–58, 80, 81, 82, 83, 90, 95, 112, 188, 199, 200, 201  
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 29, 104, 135, 136  
 self-conception, 59, 60, 83, 90  
 self-confidence, 59, 61, 62, 65, 68, 69, 74, 76, 83, 179, 186  
 self-disclosure, 60, 62, 68  
 self-esteem (self-worth), 54, 59, 61, 63–65, 68, 74, 76, 90, 112–113, 138, 146, 179, 181, 186, 200, 201  
 self-formation, 21, 32–33, 35, 46–47, 54, 59, 61, 68, 93, 135, 173, 176, 177, 182, 186, 189, 194, 196, 197, 198, 199  
 self-interest, 54, 134, 137, 142, 143, 145, 153, 157  
 self-realisation, 40, 43, 49, 54, 61, 64, 67, 68, 74, 75, 80, 83, 90, 93, 96, 104, 106, 118, 121, 135, 136, 137, 139, 143, 146, 148, 150, 176, 177, 179, 189, 194, 198, 199, 204; organised, 92, 111–115  
 self-reflectivity, 8–9, 20, 21, 46  
 self-relation, 90, 95, 96; practical, 59, 61–65, 67, 68, 74, 75, 76, 80, 81, 83, 94, 176, 177, 179–180  
 self-respect, 59, 61, 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, 74, 76, 113, 179, 181, 186, 200, 201  
 sexism, 86  
 shame, 65, 108  
 social action, 67, 73, 119, 176, 195, 203  
 social dimension, 73, 98, 176  
 social good, 76, 82, 83, 97, 174, 177, 178, 200, 202  
 social integration, 77, 81, 89, 97, 157  
 socialism, 129, 133, 157–163  
 social misdevelopments, 36, 105, 131, 148, 153, 155, 156, 157, 159, 205  
 social norm, 60, 116  
 social order, 60, 87, 132, 160, 203  
 social pathologies, 27, 36, 37, 39, 43–44, 54, 56, 69, 73, 92, 99, 103–124, 131, 135–136, 138, 148, 149, 153, 157, 159, 171, 176, 178, 196, 199, 205, 212, 214  
 social philosophy, ix, xi, 1, 2–3, 27–49, 103, 104, 107, 108, 193  
 social practices, 116  
 social reproduction, 14, 36, 67, 89, 130, 132, 162  
 social structures, 95, 119  
 social theory, 74, 87–94, 99  
 social transformation, 106, 203, 204, 207  
 social wrongs, 103, 104–105, 108, 118  
 solidarity, 143–144, 151–152, 153, 158, 163, 175, 188, 189, 190  
 species being, 138, 139, 140  
 spheres of social life, 58, 82, 86, 99

status subordination, 86–87, 97  
struggle, 31, 41–42, 43, 54, 56, 58, 61–62, 65–66, 86, 91, 132, 144, 147, 153, 157, 160, 161. *See also* recognition, struggle  
subordination, 196, 200  
suffering, 116, 117, 118–121, 195, 196  
technology, 5, 10, 13, 22, 34  
traditional theory and Critical Theory, 2, 3–4, 6  
universal: need, 67, 73, 80, 188, 201; normative standards, 39, 67;  
pragmatics, 21, 36, 39, 40; principles, 28, 75, 97, 130; rights, 66, 82, 150  
universalism, 11, 41, 57–58, 73, 76–77, 79–80, 82, 84, 85, 152, 209, 212, 213, 214  
value, 58, 60, 77, 85, 97, 130–131, 151; pluralism, 130, 185  
Verklärung, 2–3, 9  
vulnerability, 57, 65, 76, 81–82, 91  
Winnicott, Donald, 54, 59, 61–62, 68, 94  
Zurn, Christopher F., 89, 103, 121–122



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